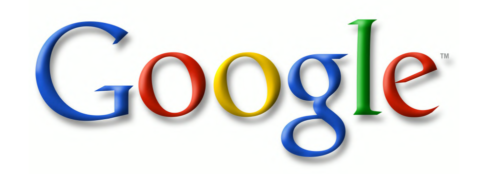




MACLEOD OF DARE.

A Novel.

VOL. II.





MACLEOD OF DARE.

A Novel.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MACLEOD OF DARE.

CHAPTER I.

REBELLION.

And where was she now—that strange creature who had bewildered and blinded his eyes and so sorely stricken his heart? It was perhaps not the least part of his trouble that all his passionate yearning to see her, and all his thinking about her, and the scenes in which he had met her, seemed unable to conjure up any satisfactory vision of her. The longing of his heart went out from him to meet—a phantom. She appeared before him in a hundred shapes, now one, now the other; but all possessed with a terrible fascination from which it was in vain for him to try to flee.

Which was she, then—the pale and sensitive

and thoughtful-eyed girl who listened with such intense interest to the gloomy tales of the northern seas; who was so fine, and perfect, and delicate; who walked so gracefully and smiled so sweetly; the timid and gentle companion and friend?

Or the wild coquette, with her arch, shy ways, and her serious laughing, and her befooling of the poor stupid lover? He could hear her laugh now; he could see her feed her canary from her own lips; where was the old mother whom that madcap girl teased, and petted, and delighted?

Or was not this she—this calm and gracious woman who received as of right the multitude of attentions that all men—and women, too—were glad to pay her? The air fine about her; the south winds fanning her cheek; the day long, and balmy, and clear. The white-sailed boats glide slowly through the water; there is a sound of music, and of gentle talk; a butterfly comes fluttering over the blue summer seas. And then there is a murmuring refrain in the lapping of the waves—*Rose-leaf, Rose-leaf, what faint wind will carry you away to the south?*

Or this audacious Duchess of Devonshire, with the flashing black eyes, and a saucy smile on her lips? She knows that every one regards her; but what of that? Away she goes through the brilliant throng with the young Highland officer, with glowing light and gay costumes and joyous music all around her. What do you think of her, you poor clown, standing there all alone and melancholy, with your cap and bells? Has she pierced your heart, too, with a flash of the saucy black eyes?

But there is still another vision; and perhaps this solitary dreamer, who has no eyes for the great slopes of Ben-an-Sloich that stretch into the clouds, and no ears for the soft calling of the sea-birds as they wheel over his head, tries hardest to fix this one in his memory. Here she is the neat and watchful house-mistress, with all things bright and shining around her; and she appears, too, as the meek daughter and the kind and caressing sister. Is it not hard that she should be torn from this quiet little haven of domestic duties and family affection, to be bound hand and foot in the chains of art and

flung into the arena to amuse that great ghoul-faced thing, the public? The white slave does not complain. While as yet she may, she presides over the cheerful table; and the beautiful small hands are helpful; and that light morning costume is a wonder of simplicity and grace. And then the garden—and the soft summer air, and the pretty ways of the two sisters: why should not this simple, homely, beautiful life last for ever, if only the summer and the roses would last for ever?

But suppose now that we turn aside from these fanciful pictures of Macleod's, and take a more commonplace one of which he could have no notion whatever? It is night—a wet and dismal night—and a four-wheeled cab is jolting along through the dark and almost deserted thoroughfares of Manchester. Miss Gertrude White is in the cab, and the truth is that she is in a thorough bad temper. Whether it was the unseemly scuffle that took place in the gallery during the performance; or whether it is that the streets of Manchester in the midst of rain, and after midnight, are not inspiriting; or whether

it is merely that she has got a headache, it is certain that Miss White is in an ill humour, and that she has not spoken a word to her maid, her only companion, since together they left the theatre. At length the cab stops opposite an hotel, which is apparently closed for the night. They get out; cross the muddy pavements under the glare of a gas-lamp; after some delay get into the hotel; pass through a dimly-lit and empty corridor; and then Miss White bids her maid good-night and opens the door of a small parlour.

Here there is a more cheerful scene. There is a fire in the room; and there is supper laid on the table; while Mr. White, with his feet on the fender and his back turned to the lamp, is seated in an easy-chair and holding up a book to the light so that the pages almost touch his gold-rimmed spectacles. Miss White sits down on the sofa on the dark side of the room. She has made no response to his greeting of "Well, Gerty?"

At length Mr. White becomes aware that his daughter is sitting there with her things on, and he turns from his book to her.

"Well, Gerty," he repeats, "aren't you going to have some supper?"

"No, thank you," she says.

"Come, come," he remonstrates, "that won't do. You must have some supper. Shall Jane get you a cup of tea?"

"I don't suppose there is any one up below; besides, I don't want it," says Miss White, rather wearily.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing," she answers, and then she looks at the mantelpiece. "No letter from Carry?"

"No."

"Well, I hope you won't make her an actress, papa," observes Miss White, with no relevance, but with considerable sharpness in her tone.

In fact this remark was so unexpected and uncalled-for that Mr. White suddenly put his book down on his knee, and turned his gold spectacles full on his daughter's face.

"I will beg you to remember, Gerty," he remarked, with some dignity, "that I did not make you an actress, if that is what you imply. If it had not been entirely your wish, I should

never have encouraged you; and I think it shows great ingratitude, not only to me but to the public also, that when you have succeeded in obtaining a position such as any woman in the country might envy, you treat your good fortune with indifference and show nothing but discontent. I cannot tell what has come over you of late. You ought certainly to be the last to say anything against a profession that has gained for you such a large share of public favour——"

"Public favour!" she said, with a bitter laugh. "Who is the favourite of the public in this very town? Why, the girl who plays in that farce — who smokes a cigarette, and walks round the stage like a man, and dances a breakdown. Why wasn't I taught to dance breakdowns?"

Her father was vexed; for this was not the first time she had dropped small rebellious hints. And if this feeling grew, she might come to question his most cherished theories!

"I should think you were jealous of that girl," said he petulantly, "if it were not too ridiculous.

You ought to remember that she is an established favourite here. She has amused these people year after year; they look on her as an old friend; they are grateful to her. The means she uses to make people laugh may not meet with your approval; but she knows her own business, doubtless; and she succeeds in her own way."

"Ah well," said Miss White, as she put aside her bonnet, "I hope you won't bring up Carry to this sort of life."

"To what sort of life?" her father exclaimed angrily. "Haven't you everything that can make life pleasant? I don't know what more you want. You have not a single care. You are petted and caressed wherever you go. And you ought to have the delight of knowing that the further you advance in your art the further rewards are in store for you. The way is clear before you. You have youth and strength; and the public is only too anxious to applaud whatever you undertake. And yet you complain of your manner of life!"

"It isn't the life of a human being at all!" she said boldly—but perhaps it was only her

headache, or her weariness, or her ill humour that drove her to this rebellion — "it is the cutting one's self off from everything that makes life worth having. It is a continual degradation — the exhibition of feelings that ought to be a woman's most sacred and secret possession. And what will the end of it be? Already I begin to think I don't know what I am. I have to sympathize with so many characters — I have to be so many different people—that I don't quite know what my own character is, or if I have any at all——"

Her father was staring at her in amazement. What had led her into these fantastic notions? While she was professing that her ambition to become a great and famous actress was the one ruling thought and object of her life, was she really envying the poor domestic drudge whom she saw coming to the theatre to enjoy herself with her fool of a husband, having withdrawn for an hour or two from her housekeeping-books and her squalling children? At all events, Miss White left him in no doubt as to her sentiments at that precise moment. She talked rapidly, and

with a good deal of bitter feeling; but it was quite obvious, from the clearness of her line of contention, that she had been thinking over the matter. And while it was all a prayer that her sister Carry might be left to live a natural life, and that she should not be compelled to exhibit, for gain or applause, emotions which a woman would naturally lock up in her own heart, it was also a bitter protest against her own lot. What was she to become, she asked? A dram-drinker of fictitious sentiment? A Ten-Minutes' Emotionalist? It was this last phrase that flashed in a new light on her father's bewildered mind. He remembered it instantly. So that was the source of inspiration?

"Oh, I see, now," he said with angry scorn. "You have learned your lesson well. A 'Ten-Minutes' Emotionalist:' I remember. I was wondering who had put such stuff into your head."

She coloured deeply, but said nothing.

"And so you are taking your notion as to what sort of life you would lead, from a

Highland savage—a boor, whose only occupations are eating and drinking and killing wild animals. A fine guide, truly! He has had so much experience of æsthetic matters! Or is it *metapheesics* is his hobby? And what, pray, is his notion as to what life should be? That the noblest object of man's ambition should be to kill a stag? It was a mistake for Dante to let his work eat into his heart; he should have devoted himself to shooting rabbits. And Raphael—don't you think he would have improved his digestion by giving up pandering to the public taste for pretty things, and taking to hunting wild boars? That is the theory, isn't it? Is that the *metapheesics* you have learned?"

"You may talk about it" she said rather humbly—for she knew very well she could not stand against her father in argument, especially on a subject that he rather prided himself on having mastered, "but you are not a woman, and you don't know what a woman feels about such things."

"And since when have you made the discovery? What has happened to convince you

so suddenly that your professional life is a degradation ?"

"Oh," she said carelessly, "I was scarcely thinking of myself. Of course I know what lies before me. It was about Carry I spoke to you."

"Carry shall decide for herself, as you did; and when she has done so, I hope she won't come and blame me the first time she gets some ridiculous idea into her head."

"Now, papa, that isn't fair," the eldest sister said, in a gentler voice. "You know I never blamed you. I only showed you that even a popular actress sometimes remembers that she is a woman. And if she is a woman you must let her have a grumble occasionally."

This conciliatory tone smoothed the matter down at once; and Mr. White turned to his book with another recommendation to his daughter to take some supper and get to bed.

"I will go now," she said rather wearily, as she rose. "Good-night, papa—— What is that ?"

She was looking at a parcel that lay on a chair.

"It came for you, to-night. There was

seven-and-sixpence to pay for extra carriage—it seems to have been forwarded from place to place."

"As if I had not enough luggage to carry about with me," she said.

But she proceeded to open the parcel all the same, which seemed to be very carefully swathed in repeated covers of canvas. And presently she uttered a slight exclamation. She took up one dark object after another—passing her hand over them, and back again, and finally pressing them to her cheek.

"Just look at these, papa—did you ever in all your life see anything so beautiful?"

She came to a letter, too; which she hastily tore open and read. It was a brief note, in terms of great respect, written by Sir Keith Macleod, and begging Miss White's acceptance of a small parcel of otter skins, which he hoped might be made into some article of attire. Moreover, he had asked his cousin's advice on the matter; and she thought there were enough; but if Miss White, on further inquiry, found she would rather have one or two more, he had

no doubt that within the next fortnight or so he could obtain these also. It was a very respectful note.

But there was no shyness or timidity about the manner of Miss White when she spread those skins out along the sofa, and again and again took them up to praise their extraordinary glossiness and softness.

"Papa," she exclaimed, "it is a present fit for a prince to make!"

"I daresay you will find them useful."

"And whatever is made of them," said she with decision, "that I shall keep for myself—it won't be one of my stage properties."

Her spirits rose wonderfully. She kept on chatting to her father about those lovely skins, and the jacket she would have of them. She asked why he was so dull that evening. She protested that she would not take any supper unless he had some too; whereupon he had a biscuit and a glass of claret, which at all events compelled him to lay aside his book. And then, when she had finished her supper, she suddenly said—

"Now, papa dear, I am going to tell you a great secret. I am going to change the song in the second act."

"Nonsense!" said he; but he was rather glad to see her come back to the interest of her work.

"I am," she said seriously. "Would you like to hear it?"

"You will wake the house up."

"And if the public expect an actress to please them," she said saucily, "they must take the consequences of her practising."

She went to the piano and opened it. There was a fine courage in her manner as she struck the chords and sang the opening lines of the gay song—

"'Three score o' nobles rode up the King's ha';
But bonnie Glenogie's the flower of them a'!
Wi' his milk-white steed and his bonnie black e'e;'—

but here her voice dropped, and it was almost in a whisper that she let the maiden of the song utter the secret wish of her heart—

"'*Glenogie, dear mither, Glenogie for me.*'"

"Of course," she said, turning round to her father, and speaking in a business-like way, though there was a spice of proud mischief in her eyes, "there is a stumbling-block, or where would the story be? Glenogie is poor; the mother will not let her have anything to do with him; the girl takes to her bed with the definite intention of dying."

She turned to the piano again—

"'There is, Glenogie, a letter for thee—
O here is, Glenogie, a letter for thee!
The first line he looked at, a light laugh laughed he;
But ere he read through it, tears blinded his e'e.'

"How do you like the air, papa?"

Mr. White did not seem over well pleased. He was quite aware that his daughter was a very clever young woman, and he did not know what insane idea might have got into her head of throwing an allegory at him.

"The air," said he coldly, "is well enough. But I hope you don't expect an English audience to understand that doggerel Scotch."

"Glenogie understood it anyway," said she

blithely, "and naturally he rode off at once to see his dying sweetheart.

"'Pale and wan was she when Glenogie gaed ben,
But rosy-red grew she when Glenogie sat down.
She turned away her head, but the smile was in her e'e,
'*O binna feared, mither, I'll maybe no dee.*'"

She shut the piano.

"Isn't it charmingly simple and tender, papa?" she said, with the same mischief in her eyes.

"I think it is foolish of you to think of exchanging that piece of doggerel——"

"For what?" said she, standing in the middle of the room—"for this?"

And therewith she sang some lines—giving an admirable burlesque imitation of herself, and her own gestures, and her own singing in the part she was then performing. It certainly was cruel to treat poor Mrs. Ross's home-made lyric so; but Miss White was burlesquing herself as well as the song she had to sing. And as her father did not know to what lengths this iconoclastic fit might lead her, he abruptly bade her good-night and went to bed, no doubt hoping

that next morning would find the demon exorcised from his daughter.

As for her, she had one more loving look over the skins, and then she carefully read through the note that accompanied them. There was a smile on her face, perhaps of pleasure, perhaps of amusement, at the simplicity of the lines. However, she turned aside, and got hold of a small writing desk which she placed on the table.

"'O here is, Glenogie, a letter for thee!'"

she hummed to herself, with rather a proud look on her face, as she seated herself and opened the desk.

CHAPTER II.

"FHIR A BHATA!"

Young Ogilvie had obtained some brief extension of his leave, but even that was drawing to a close; and Macleod saw with a secret dread that the hour of his departure was fast approaching. And yet he had not victimised the young man. After that first burst of confidence he had been sparing in his references to the trouble that had beset him. Of what avail, besides, could Mr. Ogilvie's counsels be? Once or twice he had ventured to approach the subject with some commonplace assurances that there were always difficulties in the way of two people getting married, and that they had to be overcome with patience and courage. The difficulties that Macleod knew of as between himself and that impossible goal were deeper than any mere obtaining of the consent of friends or the

arrangement of a way of living. From the moment that the terrible truth was forced on him, he had never regarded his case but as quite hopeless; and yet that in no way moderated his consuming desire to see her—to hear her speak—even to have correspondence with her. It was something that he could send her a parcel of otter skins.

But all the same Mr. Ogilvie was in some measure a friend of hers. He knew her—he had spoken to her—no doubt when he returned to the south, he would see her one day or another, and he would surely speak of the visit he had paid to Castle Dare. Macleod set about making that visit as pleasant as might be; and the weather aided him. The fair heavens shone over the windy blue seas; and the green island of Ulva lay basking in the sunlight; and as the old *Umpire*, with her heavy bows parting the rushing waves, carried them out to the west, they could see the black skarts standing on the rocks of Gometra, and clouds of puffins wheeling round the dark and lonely pillars of Staffa; while

away in the north, as they got clear of Treshnish Point, the mountains of Rhum and of Skye appeared a pale and spectral blue, like ghostly shadows at the horizon. And there was no end to the sports and pastimes that occupied day after day. On their very first expedition up the lonely corries of Ben-an-Sloich young Ogilvie brought down a royal hart—though his hand trembled for ten minutes after he pulled the trigger. They shot wild duck in Loch Scridain; and seals in Loch-na-Keal; and rock-pigeons along the face of the honeycombed cliffs of Gribun. And what was this new form of sport? They were one day being pulled in the gig up a shallow loch in the hope of finding a brood or two of young mergansers, when Macleod, who was seated up at the bow, suddenly called to the men to stop. He beckoned to Ogilvie, who went forward and saw, quietly moving over the seaweed, a hideously ugly fish with the flat head and sinister eyes of a snake. Macleod picked up the boat-hook, steadied himself in the boat, and then drove the iron spike down.

"I have him," he said. "That is the snake of the sea—I hate him as I hate a serpent."

He hoisted out of the water the dead dog-fish, which was about four feet long, and then shook it back.

"Here, Ogilvie," said he, "take the boat-hook. There are plenty about here. Make yourself St. Patrick exterminating snakes."

Ogilvie tried the dog-fish spearing with more or less success; but it was the means of procuring for him a bitter disappointment. As they went quietly over the seaweed—the keel of the boat hissing through it and occasionally grating on the sand—they perceived that the water was getting a bit deeper, and it was almost impossible to strike the boat-hook straight. At this moment Ogilvie, happening to cast a glance along the rocks close by them, started and seized Macleod's arm. What the frightened eyes of the younger man seemed to see was a great white and grey object lying on the rocks and staring at him with huge black eyes. At first it almost appeared to him

to be a man, with a grizzled and hairy face; then he tried to think of some white beast with big black eyes; then he knew. For the next second there was an unwieldy roll down the rocks, and then a splash in the water; and the huge grey seal had disappeared. And there he stood helpless, with the boat-hook in his hand.

"It is my usual luck," said he in despair. "If I had had my rifle in my hand, we should never have got within a hundred yards of the beast. But I got an awful fright. I never before saw a live seal just in front of one's nose like that."

"You would have missed him," said Macleod, coolly.

"At a dozen yards?"

"Yes. When you come on one so near as that you are too startled to take aim. You would have blazed away and missed."

"I don't think so," said Ogilvie, with some modest persistence. "When I shot that stag I was steady enough, though I felt my heart thumping away like fun."

"There you had plenty of time to take your aim—and a rock to rest your rifle on." And then he added, "You would have broken Hamish's heart, Ogilvie, if you had missed that stag. He was quite determined you should have one on your first day out; and I never saw him take such elaborate precautions before. There isn't one of the younger men can match Hamish, though he was bred a sailor."

"Well," Mr. Ogilvie admitted, "I began to think we were having a great deal of trouble for nothing; especially when it seemed as though the wind were blowing half-a-dozen ways in the one valley."

"Why, man," Macleod said, "Hamish knows every one of those eddies just as if they were all down on a chart. And he is very determined, too, you shall have another stag before you go, Ogilvie; for it is not much amusement we have been giving you since you came to us."

"That is why I feel so particularly jolly at the notion of having to go back," said

Mr. Ogilvie, with very much the air of a schoolboy at the end of his holiday. "The day after to-morrow too."

"To-morrow, then, we will try to get a stag for you; and the day after you can spend what time you can at the pools in Glen Muick."

These two last days were right royal days for the guest at Castle Dare. On the deer-stalking expedition Macleod simply refused to take his rifle with him; and spent all his time in whispered consultations with Hamish, and with eager watching of every bird whose solitary flight along the mountain-side might startle the wary hinds. After a long day of patient and stealthy creeping, and walking through bogs and streams, and slow toiling up rocky slopes, the party returned home in the evening; and when it was found that a splendid stag—with brow, bay, and tray, and crockets complete—was strapped on to the pony; and when the word was passed that Sandy the red-haired and Coll Black were to take the pony to a certain well-known cairn where another

monarch of the hills lay slain, there was a great rejoicing through Castle Dare, and Lady Macleod herself must needs come out to shake hands with her guest and to congratulate him on his good fortune.

"It is little we have been able to do to entertain you," said the old silver-haired lady, "but I am glad you have got a stag or two."

"I knew what Highland hospitality was before I came to Castle Dare," said the boy, modestly; "but you have been kinder to me even than anything I knew before."

"And you will leave the heads with Hamish," said she, "and we will send them to Glasgow to be mounted for you, and then we will send them south to you."

"Indeed no," said he (though he was thinking to himself that it was no wonder the Macleods of Dare were poor), "I will not put you to any such trouble. I will make my own arrangements with Hamish."

"Then you will tell him not to forget Aldershot."

"I think, Lady Macleod," said the young lieutenant, "that my mess-companions will be sorry to hear that I have left Dare. I should think they ought to have drunk your health many times ere now."

Next day, moreover, he was equally successful by the side of the deep brown pools in Glen Muick. He was a pretty fair fisherman, though he had had but small experience with such a mighty engine of a rod as Hamish put into his hands. When, however, he showed Hamish the fine assortment of salmon-flies he had brought with him, the old man only shook his head. Thereafter, whenever Hamish went with him, nothing was said about flies until they neared the side of the brawling stream that came pouring down between the grey rocks and the patches of moist brown moor. Hamish would sit down on a stone, and take out a tin box and open it. Then he would take a quick look round—at the aspect of the clouds, the direction of the wind, and so forth; and then, with a nimbleness that any one looking at his rough hands and broad thumbs would

have considered impossible, would busk up a weapon of capture that soon showed itself to be deadly enough. And on this last day of Ogilvie's stay at Castle Dare he was unusually lucky—though of course there were one or two heartrending mishaps. As they walked home in the evening—the lowering day had cleared away into a warm sunset, and they could see Colonsay, and Lunga, and the Dutchman lying dark and purple on a golden sea—Ogilvie said:

"Look here, Macleod—if you would like me to take one of these salmon for Miss White, I could take it as part of my luggage, and have it delivered at once."

"That would be no use," said he, rather gloomily. "She is not in London. She is at Liverpool or Manchester by this time. I have already sent her a present."

Ogilvie did not think fit to ask what; though he had guessed.

"It was a parcel of otter skins," Macleod said. "You see you might present that to any lady—it is merely a curiosity of the district

—it is no more than if an acquaintance were to give me a chip of quartz he had brought from the Rocky Mountains with a few grains of copper or silver in it."

"It is a present any lady would be glad to have," observed Mr. Ogilvie, with a smile. "Has she got them yet?"

"I do not know," Macleod answered. "Perhaps there is not time for an answer. Perhaps she has forgotten who I am, and is affronted at a stranger sending her a present."

"Forgotten who you are!" Ogilvie exclaimed; and then he looked round, to see that Hamish and Sandy the red-haired were at a convenient distance. "Do you know this, Macleod? A man never yet was in love with a woman without the woman being instantly aware of it."

Macleod glanced at him quickly; then turned away his head again—apparently watching the gulls wheeling high over the sea, black spots against the glow of the sunset.

"That is foolishness," said he. "I had a great care to be quite a stranger to her all the time I was in London. I myself scarcely knew

—how could she know? Sometimes I thought I was rude to her, so that I should deceive myself into believing she was only a stranger." Then he remembered one fact, and his downright honesty made him speak again.

"One night, it is true," said he—"it was the last night of my being in London—I asked a flower from her. She gave it to me. She was laughing at the time. That was all."

The sunset had gone away, and the clear northern twilight was fading too, when young Ogilvie, having bade good-bye to Lady Macleod and her niece Janet, got into the broad-beamed boat of the fishermen, accompanied by his friend. There was something of a breeze, and they hoisted a lug-sail so that they should run out to meet the steamer. Donald the piper-lad was not with them; Macleod wanted to speak to his friend Ogilvie as he was leaving.

And yet he did not say anything of importance. He seemed to be chiefly interested in finding out whether Ogilvie could not get a few days' leave about Christmas, that he might come up and try the winter shooting. He was given

minute particulars about the use of arsenic-paste when the box of skins to be despatched by Hamish reached London. And he was discussing what sort of mounting should be put on a strange old bottle that Janet Macleod had presented to the departing guest. There was no word of that which lay nearest his heart.

And so the black waves rolled by them; and the light at the horizon began to fade; and the stars were coming out one by one; while the two sailors forward (for Macleod was steering) were singing to themselves—

'Fhir a bhata (na horo eile),
Fhir a bhata (na horo eile),
Fhir a bhata (na horo eile),
Chead soire slann leid ge thobh a theid u!"

that is to say—

"O Boatman,
And Boatman,
And Boatman,
A hundred farewells to you wherever you may go!"

And then the lug-sail was hauled down and they lay on the lapping water; and they could hear all around them the soft callings of the

guillemots, and razor-bills, and other divers whose home is the heaving wave. And then the great steamer came up, and slowed; and the boat was hauled alongside, and young Ogilvie sprang up the slippery steps.

"Good-bye, Macleod!"

"Good-bye, Ogilvie! Come up at Christmas!"

The great bulk of the steamer soon floated away; and the lug-sail was run up again, and the boat made slowly back for Castle Dare. "Fhir a bhata!" the men sung; but Macleod scarcely heard them. His last tie with the south had been broken.

But not quite. It was about ten o'clock that night that word came to Castle Dare that John the Post had met with an accident while starting from Kinloch-Scridain; and that his place had been taken by a young lad who had but now arrived with the bag. Macleod hastily looked over the bundle of newspapers, &c., they brought him; and his eager eye fell on an envelope the writing on which made his heart jump.

"Give the lad a half-crown," said he.

And then he went to his own room. He had the letter in his hand; and he knew the hand-writing; but there was no wind of the night that could bring him the mystic message she had sent with it—

"O here is, Glenogie, a letter for thee!"

CHAPTER III.

CONFIDENCES.

For a second or two he held the letter in his hand, regarding the outside of it; and it was with more deliberation than haste that he opened it. Perhaps it was with some little tremor of fear—lest the first words that should meet his eye might be cruelly cold and distant. What right had he to expect anything else? Many a time, in thinking carefully over the past, he had recalled the words—the very tone—in which he had addressed her, and had been dismayed to think of their reserve, which had on one or two occasions almost amounted to austerity. He could expect little beyond a formal acknowledgment of the receiving of his letter and the present that had accompanied it.

Imagine, then, his surprise when he took out

from the envelope a number of sheets closely written over in her beautiful, small, neat hand. Hastily his eye ran over the first few lines; and then surprise gave way to a singular feeling of gratitude and joy. Was it indeed she who was writing to him thus? When he had been thinking of her as some one far away and unapproachable—who could have no thought of him or of the too brief time in which he had been near to her—had she indeed been treasuring up some recollection that she now seemed disposed to value?

"You will guess that I am woman enough," she wrote, "to be greatly pleased and flattered by your sending me such a beautiful present; but you must believe me when I say that its chief value to me was its showing me that I had another friend in the world who was not disposed to forget me the next day after bidding me good-bye. Perhaps you will say that I am cynical; but actresses are accustomed to find the friendships they make—outside the sphere of their own profession—of a singularly temporary character. We are praised and flattered to-day;

and forgotten to-morrow. I don't complain. It is only natural. People go away to their own families and home-occupations; why should they remember a person who has amused them for an hour?"

Miss Gertrude White could, when she chose, write a clever and interesting letter—interesting from its very simplicity and frankness; and as Macleod read on and on, he ceased to feel any wonder that this young lady should be placing before him such ample revelations of her experiences and opinions. Indeed, it was more than suggested in this confidential chat that Sir Keith Macleod himself had been the first cause of her having carefully studied her own position and the influence likely to be exerted on her by her present mode of life.

"One meets with the harsher realities of an actress's life," she said, "in the provinces. It is all very fine in London; when such friends as you happen to have are in town; and where there is constant amusement, and pleasant parties, and nice people to meet; and then you have the comforts of your own home around you,

and quiet and happy Sundays. But a provincial tour!—the constant travelling, and rehearsals with strange people, and damp lodgings, and miserable hotels, and wet Sundays in smoky towns! Papa is very good and kind, you know; but he is interested in his books, and he goes about all day hunting after curiosities, and he has not a soul to speak to. Then the audiences: I have witnessed one or two scenes lately that would unnerve any one; and of course I have to stand helpless and silent on the stage until the tumult is stilled and the original offenders expelled. Some sailors the other evening amused themselves by clambering down from the top gallery to the pit, hanging on to the gas-brackets and the pillars; and one of them managed to reach the orchestra, jump from the drum on to the stage, and then offered me a glass of whisky from a big black bottle he had in his hand. When I told papa, he laughed, and said I should be proud of my triumph over the man's imagination. But when the people roared with laughter at my discomfiture, I felt as though I would rather be earning my bread by selling

water-cresses in the street or by stitching in a garret."

Of course the cry of the poor injured soul found a ready echo in his heart. It was monstrous that she should be subjected to such indignities. And then that cruel old pagan of a father—was he not ashamed of himself to see the results of his own cold-blooded theories? Was this the glory of art? Was this the reward of the sacrifice of a life—that a sensitive girl should be publicly insulted by a drunken maniac, and jeered at by a brutal crowd? Macleod laid down the letter for a minute or two; and the look on his face was not lovely to see.

"You may think it strange that I should write thus to you," she said; "but if I say that it was yourself who first set me thinking about such things? And since I have been thinking about them, I have had no human being near me to whom I could speak. You know papa's opinions. Even if my dearest friend Mrs. Ross were here, what would she say? She has known me only in London. She thinks it a fine thing to be a popular actress. She sees people ready

to pet me in a way—so long as society is pleased to have a little curiosity about me. But she does not see the other side of the picture. She does not even ask how long all this will last. She never thinks of the cares and troubles and downright hard work. If ever you heard me sing, you will know that I have very little of a voice, and that not worth much ; but trifling as it is, you would scarcely believe the care and cultivation I have to spend on it, merely for business purposes. Mrs. Ross no doubt sees that it is pleasant enough for a young actress, who is fortunate enough to have won some public favour, to go sailing in a yacht on the Thames, on a summer day, with nice companions around her. She does not see her on a wet day in Newcastle, practising scales for an hour at a stretch, though her throat is half choked with the fog, in a dismal parlour with a piano out of tune, and with the prospect of having to go out through the wet to a rehearsal in a damp and draughty theatre, with escaped gas added to the fog. That is very nice, isn't it ?"

It almost seemed to him—so intense and eager

was his involuntary sympathy—as though he himself were breathing fog, and gas, and the foul odours of an empty theatre. He went to the window and threw it open, and sate down there. The stars were no longer quivering white on the black surface of the water, for the moon had risen now in the south, and there was a soft glow all shining over the smooth Atlantic. Sharp and white was the light on the stone walls of Castle Dare, and on the gravelled path, and the rocks, and the trees around; but far away it was a milder radiance that lay over the sea and touched here and there the shores of Inch Kenneth and Ulva and Colonsay. It was a fair and peaceful night, with no sound of human unrest to break the sleep of the world. Sleep, solemn and profound, dwelt over the lonely islands—over Staffa, with her resounding caves, and Fladda with her desolate rocks, and Iona, with her fairy-white sands, and the distant Dutchman, and Coll, and Tyree, all haunted by the wild sea-birds' cry; and a sleep as deep dwelt over the silent hills, far up under the cold light of the skies. Surely if any poor

suffering heart was vexed by the contentions of crowded cities, here, if anywhere in the world, might rest, and peace, and loving solace be found. He sat dreaming there; he had half forgotten the letter.

He roused himself from his reverie; and returned to the light.

"And yet I would not complain of mere discomfort," she continued, "if that were all. People who have to work for their living must not be too particular. What pains me most of all is the effect that this sort of work is having on myself. You would not believe—and I am almost ashamed to confess—how I am worried by small and mean jealousies and anxieties, and how I am tortured by the expression of opinions which all the same I hold in contempt. I reason with myself, to no purpose. It ought to be no concern of mine if some girl in a burlesque makes the house roar by the manner in which she walks up and down the stage, smoking a cigar; and yet I feel angry at the audience for applauding such stuff, and I wince when I see her praised in the papers. Oh! those

papers. I have been making minute inquiries of late; and I find that the usual way in these towns is to let the young literary aspirant who has just joined the office, or the clever compositor who has been promoted to the sub-editor's room, try his hand first of all at reviewing books and then turn him on to dramatic and musical criticism! Occasionally a reporter, who has been round the police-courts to get notes of the night-charges, will drop into the theatre on his way to the office, and 'do a par.,' as they call it. Will you believe it possible that the things written of me by these persons—with their pretentious airs of criticism, and their gross ignorance cropping up at every point—have the power to vex and annoy me most terribly? I laugh at the time; but the phrase rankles in my memory all the same. One learned young man said of me the other day, 'It is really distressing to mark the want of unity in her artistic characterizations when one regards the natural advantages that nature has heaped upon her with no sparing hand.' The natural advan-

tages that nature has heaped upon me! 'And perhaps, also,' he went on to say, 'Miss White would do well to pay some little more attention before venturing on pronouncing the classic names of Greece. Iphigenia herself would not have answered to her name if she had heard it pronounced with the accent on the fourth syllable.'"

Macleod brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

"If I had that fellow," said he aloud, "if I had that fellow, I should like to spin for a shark off Dubh-Artach lighthouse"—and here a most unholy vision rose before him of a new sort of sport: a sailing-launch going about six knots an hour—a goodly rope at the stern with a huge hook through the gill of the luckless critic—a swivel to make him spin—and then a few smart trips up and down by the side of the lonely Dubh-Artach rocks, where Mr. Ewing and his companions occasionally find a few sharks coming up to the surface to stare at them.

"Is it not too ridiculous that such things should vex me—that I should be so absolutely at the mercy of the opinion of people whose

judgment I know to be absolutely valueless? I find the same thing all around me. I find a middle-aged man, who knows his work thoroughly, and has seen all the best actors of the past quarter of a century, will go about quite proudly with a scrap of approval from some newspaper, written by a young man who has never travelled beyond the suburbs of his native town and has seen no acting beyond that of the local company. But there is another sort of critic—the veteran—the man who has worked hard on the paper, and worn himself out—and who is turned off from politics and pensioned by being allowed to display his imbecility in less important matters. Oh, dear, what lessons he reads you! The solemnity of them! Don't you know that at the end of the second act the business of Mrs. So-and-So (some actress who died when George IV. was king) was this, that, or the other?—and how dare you, you impertinent minx, fly in the face of well-known stage traditions? I have been introduced lately to a specimen of both classes. I think the young man—he had beautiful long fair hair and

a Byronic collar, and was a little nervous—fell in love with me, for he wrote a furious panegyric about me, and sent it next morning with a bouquet, and begged for my photograph. The elderly gentleman, on the other hand, gave me a great deal of good advice, but I subdued even him, for before he went away he spoke in a broken voice, and there were tears in his eyes—which papa said were owing to a variety of causes. It is ludicrous enough, no doubt; but it is also a little bit humiliating. I try to laugh the thing away, whether the opinion expressed about me is solemnly stupid or merely impertinent, but the vexation of it remains, and the chief vexation to me is that I should have so little command over myself, so little respect for myself, as to suffer myself to be vexed. But how can one help it? Public opinion is the very breath and life of a theatre and of every one connected with it; and you come to attach importance to the most foolish expression of opinion in the most obscure print.

"And so, my dear friend, I have had my grumble out—and made my confession too,

for I should not like to let every one know how foolish I am about these petty vexations —and you will see that I have not forgotten what you said to me, and that further reflection and experience have only confirmed it. But I must warn you. Now that I have victimised you to this fearful extent, and liberated my mind, I feel much more comfortable. As I write there is a blue colour coming into the windows that tells me the new day is coming. Would it surprise you if the new day brought a complete new set of feelings? I have begun to doubt whether I have got any opinions—whether, having to be so many different people in the course of a week, I have any clear notion as to what I myself am. One thing is certain, that I have been greatly vexed and worried of late by a succession of the merest trifles; and when I got your kind letter and present this evening, I suddenly thought, Now for a complete confession, and protest. I know you will forgive me for having victimised you; and that, as soon as you have thrown this rambling epistle into the fire, you will try to forget all the

nonsense it contains, and will believe that I hope always to remain

"Your friend,

"GERTRUDE WHITE."

His quick and warm sympathy refused to believe the half of this letter. It was only because she knew what was owing to the honour and self-respect of a true woman that she spoke in this tone of bitter and scornful depreciation of herself. It was clear that she was longing for the dignity and independence of a more natural way of life. And this revelation —that she was not after all banished for ever into that cold region of art in which her father would fain keep her—somewhat bewildered him at first. The victim might be reclaimed from the altar and restored to the sphere of simple human affections, natural duties, and peaceful ways. And if he——?

Suddenly, and with a shock of delight that made his heart throb, he tried to picture this beautiful fair creature sitting over there in that very chair, by the side of the fire, her head bent

down over her sewing, the warm light of the lamp touching the tender curve of her cheek. And when she lifted her head to speak to him—and when her large and lambent eyes met his—surely Fionaghal the fair poetess from strange lands never spoke in softer tones than this other beautiful stranger, who has become his wife and his heart's companion. And now he will bid her lay aside her work; and he will get a white shawl for her; and like a ghost she will steal out with him into the moonlight air. And is there enough wind on this summer night to take them out from the sombre shore to the open plain of the sea? Look now, as the land recedes, at the high walls of Castle Dare, over the black cliffs, and against the stars. Far away they see the graveyard of Inch Kenneth, the stones pale in the moonlight. And what song will she sing now, that Ulva and Colonsay may awake and fancy that some mermaiden is singing to bewail her lost lover? The night is sad—and the song is sad—and then, somehow, he finds himself alone in this waste of water—and all the shores of the islands are silent and

devoid of life—and there is only the echo of the sad singing in his ears——

He jumps to his feet; for there is a knocking at the door. The gentle cousin Janet enters; and hastily he thrusts that letter into his pocket, while his face blushes hotly.

"Where have you been, Keith?" she says, in her quiet kindly way. "Auntie would like to say good-night to you now."

"I will come directly," said he.

"And now that Norman Ogilvie is away, Keith," said she, "you will take more rest about the shooting; for you have not been looking like yourself at all lately; and you know, Keith, when you are not well and happy, it is no one at all about Dare that is happy either. And that is why you will take care of yourself."

He glanced at her rather uneasily; but he said in a light and careless way—

"Oh, I have been well enough, Janet, except that I was not sleeping well one or two nights. And if you look after me like that, you will make me think I am a baby, and you will

send me some warm flannels when I go up on the hills."

"It is too proud of your hardihood you are, Keith," said his cousin, with a smile. "But there never was a man of your family who would take any advice."

"I would take any advice from you, Janet," said he; and therewith he followed her to bid good-night to the silver-haired mother.

CHAPTER IV.

A RESOLVE.

HE slept but little that night; and early the next morning he was up and out and away by himself—paying but little heed to the rushing blue seas, and the white gulls, and the sunshine touching the far sands on the shores of Iona. He was in a fever of unrest. He knew not what to make of that letter; it might mean anything or nothing. Alternations of wild hope and cold despair succeeded each other. Surely it was unusual for a girl so to reveal her innermost confidences to any one whom she considered a stranger? To him alone had she told this story of her private troubles. Was it not in effect asking for a sympathy which she could not hope for from any other? Was it not establishing a certain secret between them?

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Her own father did not know. Her sister was too young to be told. Friends like Mrs. Ross could not understand why this young and beautiful actress, the favourite of the public, could be dissatisfied with her lot. It was to him alone she had appealed.

And then again he read the letter. The very frankness of it made him fear. There was none of the shyness of a girl writing to one who might be her lover. She might have written thus to one of her school-companions. He eagerly searched it for some phrase of tenderer meaning; but no—there was a careless abandonment about it, as if she had been talking without thinking of the person she addressed. She had even joked about a young man falling in love with her. It was a matter of perfect indifference to her. It was ludicrous as the shape of the lad's collar was ludicrous—but of no more importance. And thus she receded from his imagination again; and became a thing apart —the white slave bound in those cruel chains that seemed to all but herself and him the badges of triumph.

Herself and him—the conjunction set his heart throbbing quickly. He eagerly bethought himself how this secret understanding could be strengthened if only he might see her and speak to her. He could tell by her eyes what she meant, whatever her words might be. *If only he could see her again*:—all his wild hopes, and fears, and doubts—all his vague fancies and imaginings—began to narrow themselves down to this one point; and this immediate desire became all-consuming. He grew sick at heart when he looked round and considered how vain was the wish.

The gladness had gone from the face of Keith Macleod. Not many months before any one would have imagined that the life of this handsome young fellow, whose strength and courage and high spirits seemed to render him insensible to any obstacle, had everything in it that the mind of man could desire. He had a hundred interests and activities; he had youth, and health, and a comely presence; he was on good terms with everybody around him—for he had a smile and a cheerful word for each one he

met, gentle or simple. All this gay, glad life seemed to have fled. The watchful Hamish was the first to notice that his master began to take less and less interest in the shooting and boating and fishing; and at times the old man was surprised and disturbed by an exhibition of querulous impatience that had certainly never before been one of Macleod's failings. Then his cousin Janet saw that he was silent and absorbed; and his mother inquired once or twice why he did not ask one or other of his neighbours to come over to Dare to have a day's shooting with him.

"I think you are finding the place lonely, Keith, now that Norman Ogilvie is gone," said she.

"Ah, mother," he said with a laugh, "it is not Norman Ogilvie, it is London, that has poisoned my mind. I should never have gone to the south. I am hungering for the flesh-pots of Egypt already; and I am afraid some day I will have to come and ask you to let me go away again."

He spoke jestingly, and yet he was regarding his mother.

"I know it is not pleasant for a young man to be kept fretting at home," said she. "But it is not long now I will ask you to do that, Keith."

Of course this brief speech only drove him into more vigorous demonstration that he was not fretting at all; and for a time he seemed more engrossed than ever in all the occupations he had but recently abandoned. But whether he was on the hill-side, or down in the glen, or out among the islands—or whether he was trying to satisfy the hunger of his heart with books, long after every one in Castle Dare had gone to bed—he could not escape from this gnawing and torturing anxiety. It was no beautiful and gentle sentiment that possessed him—a pretty thing to dream about during a summer's morning—but on the contrary a burning fever of unrest that left him peace nor day nor night. "Sudden love is followed by sudden hate," says the Gaelic proverb; but there had been no suddenness at all about this passion that had stealthily got hold of him; and he had ceased even to hope that it might abate or

depart altogether. He had to "dree his weird." And when he read in books about the joy and delight that accompany the awakening of love —how the world suddenly becomes fair, and the very skies are bluer than their wont—he wondered whether he was different from other human beings. The joy and delight of love? He knew only a sick hunger of the heart and a continual and brooding despair.

One morning he was going along the cliffs, his only companion being the old black retriever, when sudden he saw, far away below him, the figure of a lady. For a second his heart stood still at the sight of this stranger; for he knew it was neither the mother nor Janet; and she was coming along a bit of greensward from which, by dint of much climbing, she might have reached Castle Dare. But as he watched her, he caught sight of some other figures, further below on the rocks. And then he perceived—as he saw her return with a handful of bell-heather—that this party had come from Iona, or Bunessan, or some such place, to explore one of the great caves on the coast, while this lady had

wandered away from them in search of some wild-flowers. By and by he saw the small boat, with its sprit-sail white in the sun, go away towards the south, and the lonely coast was left as lonely as before.

But ever after that he grew to wonder what Gertrude White, if ever she could be persuaded to visit his home, would think of this thing and of that thing—what flowers she would gather—whether she would listen to Hamish's stories of the fairies—whether she would be interested in her small countryman, Johnny Wickes, who now wore the kilt, with his face and legs as brown as a berry—whether the favourable heavens would send her sunlight and blue skies, and the moonlight nights reveal to her the solemn glory of the sea and the lonely islands. Would she take his hand to steady herself in passing over the slippery rocks? What would she say if suddenly she saw above her—by the opening of a cloud—a stag standing high on a crag near the summit of Ben-an-Sloich? And what would the mother and Janet say to that singing of hers, if they were to hear her

put all the tenderness of the low, sweet voice into "Wae's me for Prince Charlie"?

There was one secret nook that more than any other he associated with her presence; and thither he would go when his heart-sickness seemed too grievous to be borne. It was down in a glen beyond the fir-wood; and here the ordinary desolation of this bleak coast ceased, for there were plenty of young larches on the sides of the glen, with a tall silver birch or two; while down in the hollow there were clumps of alders by the side of the brawling stream. And this dell that he sought was hidden away from sight, with the sun but partially breaking through the alders and rowans, and bespeckling the great grey boulders by the side of the burn, many of which were covered by the softest of olive-green moss. Here, too, the brook that had been broken just above by intercepting stones, swept clearly and limpidly over a bed of smooth rock; and in the golden-brown water the trout lay, and scarcely moved until some motion of his hand made them shoot up stream with a lightning speed. And then

the wild flowers around—the purple ling and red bell-heather growing on the silver-grey rocks; a foxglove or two towering high above the golden-green breckans; the red star of a crane's-bill among the velvet moss. Even if she were overawed by the solitariness of the Atlantic and the gloom of the tall cliffs and their yawning caves, surely here would be a haven of peace and rest, with sunshine, and flowers, and the pleasant murmur of the stream. What did it say, then, as one sat and listened in the silence? When the fair poetess from strange lands came among the Macleods, did she seek out this still retreat, and listen, and listen, and listen until she caught the music of this monotonous murmur, and sang it to her harp? And was it not all a song about the passing away of life, and how that summer days were for the young, and how the world was beautiful for lovers? "O children!" it seemed to say, "why should you waste your lives in vain endeavour, while the winter is coming quick, and the black snow-storms, and a roaring of wind from the sea? Here I have flowers for

you, and beautiful sunlight, and the peace of summer days. Time passes—time passes—time passes—and you are growing old. While as yet the heart is warm and the eye is bright, here are summer flowers for you, and a silence fit for the mingling of lovers' speech. If you listen not, I laugh at you and go my way. But the winter is coming fast."

Far away in these grimy towns, fighting with mean cares and petty jealousies, dissatisfied, despondent, careless as to the future, how could this message reach her to fill her heart with the singing of a bird? He dared not send it, at all events. But he wrote to her. And the bitter travail of the writing of that letter he long remembered. He was bound to give her his sympathy, and to make light as well as he could of those very evils which he had been the first to reveal to her. He tried to write in as frank and friendly a spirit as she had done; the letter was quite cheerful.

"Did you know," said he, "that once upon a time the Chief of the Macleods married a fairy? And whether Macleod did not treat her well;

or whether the fairy-folk reclaimed her; or whether she grew tired of the place, I do not know quite; but at all events they were separated, and she went away to her own people. And before she went away she gave to Macleod a fairy banner—the *Bratach sith* it is known as—and she told him that if ever he was in great peril, or had any great desire, he was to wave that flag, and whatever he desired would come to pass; but the virtue of the *Bratach sith* would depart after it had been waved three times. Now the small green banner has been waved only twice; and each time it has saved the clan from a great danger; and it is still preserved in the castle of Dunvegan, with power to work one more miracle on behalf of the Macleods. And if I had the fairy flag, do you know what I would do with it? I would take it in my hand, and say, '*I desire the fairy people to remove my friend Gertrude White from all the evil influences that disturb and distress her. I desire them to heal her wounded spirit, and secure for her everything that may tend to her life-long happiness. And I desire that all*

the theatres in the kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland—with all their musical instruments, lime-light, and painted scenes—may be taken and dropped into the ocean, midway between the islands of Ulva and Coll, so that the fairy folk may amuse themselves in them if they will so please.' Would not that be a very nice form of incantation? We are very strong believers here in the power of one person to damage another in absence; and when you can kill a man by sticking pins into a waxen image of him—which everybody knows to be true—surely you ought to be able to help a friend, especially with the aid of the *Bratach sith.* Imagine Covent Garden Theatre a hundred fathoms down in the deep sea, with mermaidens playing the brass instruments in the orchestra, and the fairy-folk on the stage, and seals disporting themselves in the stalls, and guillemots shooting about the upper galleries in pursuit of fish. But we should get no peace from Iona. The fairies there are very pious people. They used to carry St. Columba about when he got tired. They would be sure to demand the shutting up of all

the theatres, and the destruction of the brass instruments. And I don't see how we could reasonably object."

It was a cruel sort of jesting; but how otherwise than as a jest could he convey to her, an actress, his wish that all theatres were at the bottom of the sea? For a brief time that letter seemed to establish some link of communication between him and her. He followed it on its travels by sea and land. He thought of its reaching the house in which she dwelt—perhaps some plain and grimy building in a great manufacturing city, or perhaps a small quiet cottage up by Regent's Park half hidden by the golden leaves of October. Might she not, moreover, after she had opened it and read it, be moved by some passing whim to answer it, though it demanded no answer? He waited for a week, and there was no word or message from the south. She was far away, and silent. And the hills grew lonelier than before; and the sickness of his heart increased.

This state of mind could not last. His longing and impatience and unrest became

more than he could bear. It was in vain that he tried to satisfy his imaginative craving with these idle visions of her: it was she herself he must see; and he set about devising all manner of wild excuses for one last visit to the south. But the more he considered these various projects, the more ashamed he grew in thinking of his taking any one of them and placing it before the beautiful old dame who reigned in Castle Dare. He had barely been three months at home: how could he explain to her this sudden desire to go away again?

One morning his cousin Janet came to him.

"O Keith!" said she, "the whole house is in commotion; and Hamish is for murdering some of the lads; and there is no one would dare to bring the news to you. The two young buzzards have escaped."

"I know it," he said. "I let them out myself."

"You!" she exclaimed in surprise; for she knew the great interest he had shown in watching the habits of the young hawks that had been captured by a shepherd lad.

"Yes. I let them out last night. It was a pity to have them caged up."

"So long as it was yourself, it is all right," she said; and then she was going away. But she paused, and turned, and said to him, with a smile, "And I think you should let yourself escape, too, Keith; for it is you, too, that are caged up; and perhaps you feel it now more since you have been to London. And if you are thinking of your friends in London, why should you not go for another visit to the south, before you settle down to the long winter?"

For an instant he regarded her with some fear. Had she guessed his secret? Had she been watching the outward signs of this constant torture he had been suffering? Had she surmised that the otter-skins about which he had asked her advice were not consigned to any one of the married ladies whose acquaintance he had made in the south and of whom he had chatted freely enough in Castle Dare? Or was this merely a passing suggestion thrown out by one who was always on the look-out to do a kindness?

"Well, I would like to go, Janet," he said, but with no gladness in his voice, "and it is not more than a week or two I should like to be away; but I do not think the mother would like it; and it is enough money I have spent this year already——"

"There is no concern about the money, Keith," said she simply, "since you have not touched what I gave you. And if you are set upon it, you know auntie will agree to whatever you wish."

"But how can I explain to her? It is unreasonable to be going away."

How, indeed, could he explain? He was almost assuming that those gentle eyes now fixed on him could read his heart; and that she would come to aid him in his suffering without any further speech from him. And that was precisely what Janet Macleod did—whether or not she had guessed the cause of his desire to get away.

"If you were a schoolboy, Keith, you would be cleverer at making an excuse for playing truant," she said laughing. "And I could make one for you now."

"You?"

"I will not call it an excuse, Keith," she said, "because I think you would be doing a good work; and I will bear the expense of it, if you please."

He looked more puzzled than ever.

"When we were at Salen yesterday I saw Major Stuart, and he has just come back from Dunrobin. And he was saying very great things about the machine for the drying of crops in wet weather, and he said he would like to go to England to see the newer ones and all the later improvements, if there was a chance of any one about here going shares with him. Now it would not be very much, Keith, if you were to share with him; and the machine can be moved about very well; and in the bad weather you could give the crofters some help, to say nothing about our own hay and corn. And that is what Major Stuart was saying yesterday, that if there was any place that you wanted a drying machine for the crops, it was in Mull."

"I have been thinking of it myself," he said, absently, "but our farm is too small to make it pay——"

"But if Major Stuart will take half the expense? And even if you lost a little, Keith, you would save a great deal to the poorer people, who are continually losing their little patches of crops. Now will you be my agent, Keith, to go and see whether it is practicable?"

"They will not thank you, Janet, for letting them have this help for nothing."

"They shall not have it for nothing," said she—for she had plenty of experience in dealing with the poorer folk around—"they must pay for the fuel that is used. And now, Keith, if it is a holiday you want, will not that be a very good holiday—and one to be used for a good purpose too?"

She left him. Where was the eager joy with which he ought to have accepted this offer? Here was the very means placed within his reach of satisfying the craving desire of his heart; and yet, all the same, he seemed to shrink back with a vague and undefined dread. A thousand impalpable fears and doubts beset his mind. He had grown timid as a woman. The old happy audacity had been destroyed

by sleepless nights and a torturing anxiety. It was a new thing for Keith Macleod to have become a prey to strange unintelligible forebodings.

But he went and saw Major Stuart—a round, red, jolly little man, with white hair, and a cheerful smile, who had a sombre and melancholy wife. Major Stuart received Macleod's offer with great gravity. It was a matter of business that demanded serious consideration. He had worked out the whole system of drying crops with hot air as it was shown him in pamphlets, reports, and agricultural journals; and he had come to the conclusion that—on paper at least—it could be made to pay. What was wanted was to give the thing a practical trial. If the system was sound, surely any one who helped to introduce it into the western Highlands was doing a very good work indeed. And there was nothing but personal inspection could decide on the various merits of the latest improvements.

This was what he said before his wife, one night at dinner. But when the ladies had left

the room, the little stout Major suddenly put up both his hands, snapped his thumb and middle finger, and very cleverly executed one or two reel steps.

"By George! my boy," said he with a ferocious grin on his face, "I think we will have a little frolic—a little frolic—a little frolic! You were never shut up in a house for six months with a woman like my wife—were you, Macleod? You were never reminded of your coffin every morning, were you? Macleod, my boy, I am just wild to get after those drying machines!"

And indeed Macleod could not have had a merrier companion to go south with him than this rubicund Major just escaped from the thraldom of his wife. But it was with no such high spirits that Macleod set out. Perhaps it was only the want of sleep that had rendered him nerveless and morbid; but he felt as he left Castle Dare, and as again he went out to meet the great steamer coming over the sea, that there was a lie in his actions, if not in his words. And as for the future that lay



CASTLE DARE.

efore him, it was a region only of doubt, and ague regrets, and unknown fears; and he was ntering upon it without any glimpse of light nd without the guidance of any friendly and.

CHAPTER V.

OTTER-SKINS.

"AH, papa," said Miss Gertrude White—and she pretended to sigh as she spoke—"this is a change indeed."

They were driving up to the gate of the small cottage in South Bank. It was the end of October. In the gardens they passed the trees were almost bare, though such leaves as hung sparsely on the branches of the chestnuts and maples were ablaze with russet and gold in the misty sunshine.

"In another week," she continued, "there will not be a leaf left. I dare say there is not a single geranium in the garden. All hands on deck to pipe a farewell!—

> Ihr Matten, lebt wohl,
> Ihr sonnigen Weiden!
> Der Senne muss scheiden,
> Der Sommer ist hin.

"Farewell to the blue mountains of Newcastle, and the sunlit valleys of Liverpool, and the silver waterfalls of Leeds; the summer is indeed over; and a very nice and pleasant summer we have had it."

The flavour of sarcasm running through this affected sadness vexed Mr. White, and he answered sharply—

"I think you have little reason to grumble over a tour which has so distinctly added to your reputation."

"I was not aware," said she, with a certain careless sauciness of manner, "that an actress was allowed to have a reputation—at least, there are always plenty of people anxious enough to take it away."

"Gertrude," said he sternly, "what do you mean by this constant carping? Do you wish to cease to be an actress? or, what in all the world do you want?"

"To cease to be an actress?" she said with a mild wonder, and with the sweetest of smiles, as she prepared to get out of the open door of the brougham. "Why, don't you know, papa,

that a leopard cannot change his spots, or an Ethiopian his skin? Take care of the step, dear. That's right. Come here, Marie, and give James a hand with this portmanteau."

Miss White was not grumbling at all—but on the contrary was quite pleasant and cheerful—when she entered the small house and found herself once more at home.

"Oh, Carry," she said, when her sister followed her into her room, "you don't know what it is to get back home after having been bandied from one hotel to another hotel, and from one lodging-house to another lodging-house, for goodness knows how long."

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Carry, with such marked coldness that her sister turned to her.

"What is the matter with you?"

"What is the matter with *you?*" the younger sister retorted, with sudden fire. "Do you know that your letters to me have been quite disgraceful?"

"You are crazed, child—you wrote something about it the other day—I could not

make out what you meant," said Miss White; and she went to the glass to see that the beautiful brown hair had not been too much disarranged by the removal of her bonnet.

"It is you are crazed, Gertrude White," said Carry, who had apparently picked up from some melodrama the notion that it was rather effective to address a person by her full name; "I am really ashamed of you—that you should have let yourself be bewitched by a parcel of beasts' skins. I declare that your ravings about the Highlands, and fairies, and trash of that sort have been only fit for a penny journal——"

Miss White turned and stared—as well she might. This indignant person of fourteen had flashing eyes and a visage of wrath. The pale, calm, elder sister only remarked, in that deep-toned and gentle voice of hers—

"Your language is pretty considerably strong, Carry. I don't know what has aroused such a passion in you. Because I wrote to you about the Highlands? Because I sent you that collection of legends? Because it seemed to me

when I was in a wretched hotel in some dirty town, I would rather be away yachting or driving with some one of the various parties of people whom I know, and who had mostly gone to Scotland this year? If you are jealous of the Highlands, Carry, I will undertake to root out the name of every mountain and lake that has got hold of my affections."

She was turning away again, with a quiet smile on her face, when her younger sister arrested her.

"What's that?" said she, so sharply, and extending her forefinger so suddenly, that Gertrude almost shrank back.

"What's what?" she said in dismay—fearing perhaps to hear of an adder being on her shoulder.

"You know perfectly well," said Miss Carry, vehemently, "it is the Macleod tartan!"

Now the truth was that Miss White's travelling dress was of an unrelieved grey; the only scrap of colour about her costume being a tiny thread of tartan ribbon that just showed in front of her collar.

"The Macleod tartan?" said the elder sister, demurely. "And what if it were the Macleod tartan?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Gerty! There was quite enough occasion for people to talk in the way he kept coming here—and now you make a parade of it—you ask people to look at you wearing a badge of servitude—you say, 'Oh, here I am; and I am quite ready to be your wife when you ask me, Sir Keith Macleod!'"

There was no flush of anger in the fair and placid face; but rather a look of demure amusement in the downcast eyes.

"Dear me, Carry," said she with great innocence, "the profession of an actress must be looking up in public estimation when such a rumour as that could even get into existence. And so people have been so kind as to suggest that Sir Keith Macleod, the representative of one of the oldest and proudest families in the kingdom, would not be above marrying a poor actress who has her living to earn, and who is supported by the half-crowns and half-sovereigns

of the public? And indeed I think it would look very well to have him loitering about the stage-doors of provincial theatres until his wife should be ready to come out; and would he bring his gillies, and keepers, and head-foresters, and put them into the pit to applaud her? Really, the *rôle* you have cut out for a Highland gentleman——"

"A Highland gentleman!" exclaimed Carry. "A Highland pauper! But you are quite right, Gerty, to laugh at the rumour. Of course it is quite ridiculous. It is quite ridiculous to think that an actress whose fame is all over England—who is sought after by everybody, and the popularest favourite ever seen—would give up everything and go away and marry an ignorant Highland savage, and look after his calves and his cows and hens for him. That is indeed ridiculous, Gerty."

"Very well, then, put it out of your mind, and never let me hear another word about it," said the popularest favourite, as she undid the bit of tartan ribbon, "and if it is any great comfort to you to know, this is not the Macleod

tartan, but the MacDougal tartan, and you may put it in the fire if you like."

Saying which, she threw on the table the bit of costume which had given so great offence. The discomfited Carry looked at it, but would not touch it. At last she said—

"Where are the skins, Gerty?"

"Near Castle Dare," answered Miss White, turning to get something else for her neck, "there is a steep hill, and the road comes over it. When you climb to the top of the hill and sit down, the fairies will carry you right to the bottom, if you are in a proper frame of mind. But they won't appear at all unless you are at peace with all men. I will show the skins when you are in a proper frame of mind, Carry."

"Who told you that story?" she asked quickly.

"Sir Keith Macleod," the elder sister said without thinking.

"Then he has been writing to you?"

"Certainly."

She marched out of the room. Gertrude

White, unconscious of the fierce rage she had aroused, carelessly proceeded with her toilette, trying now one flower and now another in the ripples of her sun-brown hair, but finally discarding these half-withered things for a narrow band of blue velvet.

> "Three score of nobles rode up the king's ha',"

she was humming thoughtlessly to herself as she stood with her hands uplifted to her head, revealing the beautiful lines of her figure,

> "But bonnie Glenogie's the flower o' them a';
> Wi' his milk-white steed and his coal-black e'e:
> Glenogie, dear mither, Glenogie for me!"

At length she had finished, and was ready to proceed to her immediate work of overhauling domestic affairs. When Keith Macleod was struck by the exceeding neatness and perfection of arrangement in this small house, he was in nowise the victim of any stage-effect. Gertrude White was at all times and in all seasons a precise and accurate house-mistress. Harassed, as an actress must often be, by other cares;

sometimes exhausted with hard work; perhaps tempted now and again by the self-satisfaction of a splendid triumph to let meaner concerns go unheeded; all the same she allowed nothing to interfere with her domestic duties.

"Gerty," her father said impatiently to her a day or two before they left London for the provinces, "what is the use of your going down to those stores yourself? Surely you can send Jane or Marie. You really waste far too much time over the veriest trifles: how can it matter what sort of mustard we have?"

"And, indeed, I am glad to have something to convince me that I am a human being and a woman," she had said instantly, "something to be myself in. I believe Providence intended me to be the manager of a Swiss hotel."

This was one of the first occasions on which she had revealed to her father that she had been thinking a good deal about her lot in life, and was perhaps beginning to doubt whether the struggle to become a great and famous actress was the only thing worth living for. But he paid little attention to it at the

time. He had a vague impression that it was scarcely worth discussing. He was pretty well convinced that his daughter was clever enough to argue herself into any sort of belief about herself, if she should take some fantastic notion into her head. It was not until that night in Manchester that he began to fear there might be something serious in these expressions of discontent.

On this bright October morning Miss Gertrude White was about to begin her domestic inquiries, and was leaving her room humming cheerfully to herself something about the bonnie Glenogie of the song, when she was again stopped by her sister, who was carrying a bundle.

"I have got the skins," she said, gloomily. "Jane took them out."

"Will you look at them?" the sister said kindly. "They are very pretty. If they were not a present, I would give them to you, to make a jacket of them."

"*I* wear them?" said she. "Not likely!"

Nevertheless she had sufficient womanly

curiosity to let her elder sister open the parcel; and then she took up the otter-skins one by one, and looked at them.

"I don't think much of them," she said.

The other bore this taunt patiently.

"They are only big moles, aren't they? And I thought moleskin was only worn by working people."

"I am a working person too," Miss Gertrude White said, "but in any case I think a jacket of these skins will look lovely."

"Oh, do you think so? Well, you can't say much for the smell of them."

"It is no more disagreeable than the smell of a seal-skin jacket."

She laid down the last of the skins with some air of disdain.

"It will be a nice series of trophies, any way—showing you know some one who goes about spending his life in killing inoffensive animals."

"Poor Sir Keith Macleod! What has he done to offend you, Carry?"

Miss Carry turned her head away for a

minute; but persently she boldly faced her sister.

"Gerty, you don't mean to marry a beauty man?"

Gerty looked considerably puzzled; but her companion continued vehemently—

"How often have I heard you say you would never marry a beauty man—a man who has been brought up in front of the looking-glass—who is far too well satisfied with his own good looks to think of anything or anybody else! Again and again you have said that, Gertrude White. You told me, rather than marry a self-satisfied coxcomb, you would marry a misshapen, ugly little man, so that he would worship you all the days of your life for your condescension and kindness."

"Very well, then!"

"And what is Sir Keith Macleod but a beauty man?"

"He is not!" and for once the elder sister betrayed some feeling in the proud tone of her voice. "He is the manliest-looking man that I have ever seen; and I have seen a

good many more men than you. There is not a man you know whom he could not throw across the canal down there. Sir Keith Macleod a beauty man!—I think he could take on a good deal more polishing, and curling, and smoothing without any great harm. If I was in any danger, I know which of all the men I have seen I would rather have in front of me—with his arms free; and I don't suppose he would be thinking of any looking-glass! If you want to know about the race he represents, read English history, and the story of England's wars. If you go to India, or China, or Africa, or the Crimea, you will hear something about the Macleods, I think!"

Carry began to cry.

"You silly thing, what is the matter with you?" Gertrude White exclaimed; but of course her arm was round her sister's neck.

"It is true, then."

"What is true?"

"What people say."

"What do people say?"

"That you will marry Sir Keith Macleod."

"Carry!" she said angrily, "I can't imagine who has been repeating such idiotic stories to you. I wish people would mind their own business. Sir Keith Macleod marry me!——"

"Do you mean to say he has never asked you?" Carry said, disengaging herself, and fixing her eyes on her sister's face.

"Certainly not!" was the decided answer; but all the same Miss Gertrude White's forehead and cheeks flushed slightly.

"Then you know that he means to—and that is why you have been writing to me, day after day, about the romance of the Highlands, and fairy stories, and the pleasure of people who could live without caring for the public. Oh, Gerty, why won't you be frank with me, and let me know the worst at once?"

"If I gave you a box on the ears," she said, laughing, "that would be the worst at once; and I think it would serve you right for listening to such tittle-tattle and letting your head be filled with nonsense. Haven't you sufficient sense to know that you ought not to compel me to speak of such a thing—absurd as it is?

I cannot go on denying that I am about to become the wife of Tom, Dick, or Harry; and you know the stories that have been going about for years past. Who was I last? The wife of a Russian nobleman who gambled away all my earnings at Homburg. You are fourteen now, Carry; you should have more sense."

Miss Carry dried her eyes; but she mournfully shook her head. There were the otter-skins lying on the table. She had seen plenty of the absurd paragraphs about her sister which good-natured friends had cut out of provincial and foreign papers and forwarded to the small family at South Bank. But the mythical Russian nobleman had never sent a parcel of otter-skins. These were palpable and not to be explained away. She sorrowfully left the room, unconvinced.

And now Miss Gertrude White set to work with a will; and no one who was only familiar with her outside her own house would have recognised in this shifty, practical, industrious person, who went so thoroughly into all the details of the small establishment, the lady

who, when she went abroad among the gaieties of the London season, was so eagerly sought after, and flattered, and petted, and made the object of all manner of delicate attentions. Her father, who suspected that her increased devotion to these domestic duties was but part of that rebellious spirit she had recently betrayed, had nevertheless to confess that there was no one but herself whom he could trust to arrange his china and dust his curiosities. And how could he resent her giving instructions to the cook, when it was his own dinner that profited thereby?

"Well, Gerty," he said that evening after dinner, "what do you think about Mr.——'s offer? It is very good-natured of him to let you have the ordering of the drawing-room scene; for you can have the furniture and the colour to suit your own costume."

"Indeed I shall have nothing whatever to do with it," said she, promptly. "The furniture at home is enough for me. I don't wish to become the upholsterer of a theatre."

"You are very ungrateful then. Half the

effect of a modern comedy is lost because the people appear in rooms which resemble nothing at all that people ever lived in. Here is a man who gives you *carte blanche* to put a modern drawing-room on the stage; and your part would gain infinitely from having real surroundings. I consider it a very flattering offer."

"And perhaps it is, papa," said she, "but I think I do enough if I get through my own share of the work. And it is very silly of him to want me to introduce a song into this part too. He knows I can't sing——"

"Gerty!" her sister said.

"Oh, you know as well as I. I can get through a song well enough in a room; but I have not enough voice for a theatre; and although he says it is only to make the drawing-room scene more realistic—and that I need not sing to the front—that is all nonsense. I know what it is meant for—to catch the gallery. Now I refuse to sing for the gallery."

This was decided enough.

"What was the song you put into your last part, Gerty?" her sister asked. "I saw something in the papers about it."

"It was a Scotch one, Carry; I don't think you know it."

"I wonder it was not a Highland one," her sister said rather spitefully.

"Oh, I have a whole collection of Highland ones now—would you like to hear one? Would you, papa?"

She went and fetched the book, and opened the piano.

"It is an old air that belonged to Scarba," she said, and then she sang, simply and pathetically enough, the somewhat stiff and cumbrous English translation of the Gaelic words. It was the song of the exiled Mary Macleod, who, sitting on the shores of "sea-worn Mull," looks abroad on the lonely islands of Scarba, and Islay, and Jura, and laments that she is far away from her own home.

"How do you like it, papa?" she said, when she had finished. "It is a pity I do not know Gaelic. They say that when the chief heard

these verses repeated, he let the old woman go back to her own home."

One of the two listeners, at all events, did not seem to be particularly struck by the pathos of Mary Macleod's lament. She walked up to the piano.

"Where did you get that book, Gerty?" she said in a firm voice.

"Where?" said the other, innocently. "In Manchester, I think it was I bought it."

But before she had made the explanation, Miss Carry, convinced that this, too, had come from her enemy, had seized the book and turned to the title-page. Neither on title-page nor on fly-leaf, however, was there any inscription.

"Did you think it had come with the otter-skins, Carry?" the elder sister said, laughing; and the younger one retired, baffled and chagrined, but none the less resolved that before Gertrude White completely gave herself up to this blind infatuation for a savage country and for one of its worthless inhabitants, she would have to run the gauntlet of many a sharp word of warning and reproach.

CHAPTER VI.

IN LONDON AGAIN.

On through the sleeping counties rushed the train—passing woods, streams, fertile valleys, and clustering villages all palely shrouded in the faint morning mist that had a sort of suffused and hidden sunlight in it: the world had not yet awoke. But Macleod knew that, ere he reached London, people would be abroad; and he almost shrank from meeting the look of those thousands of eager faces. Would not some of them guess his errand? Would he not be sure to run against a friend of hers—an acquaintance of his own? It was with a strange sense of fear that he stepped out and on to the platform at Euston Station; he glanced up and down: if she were suddenly to confront his eyes! A day or two ago it seemed as if

innumerable leagues of ocean lay between him and her, so that the heart grew sick with thinking of the distance; now that he was in the same town with her he felt so close to her that he could almost hear her breathe.

Major Stewart had enjoyed a sound night's rest, and was now possessed of quite enough good spirits and loquacity for two. He scarcely observed the silence of his companion. Together they rattled away through this busy, eager, immense throng, until they got down to the comparative quiet of Bury Street; and here they were fortunate enough to find not only that Macleod's old rooms were unoccupied, but that his companion could have the corresponding chambers on the floor above. They changed their attire; had breakfast; and then proceeded to discuss their plans for the day. Major Stewart observed that he was in no hurry to investigate the last modifications of the drying machines. It would be necessary to write and appoint an interview before going down into Essex. He had several calls to make in London; if Macleod did not see him before, they should

meet at seven for dinner. Macleod saw him depart without any great regret.

When he himself went outside it was already noon, but the sun had not yet broken through the mist, and London seemed cold, and lifeless, and deserted. He did not know of any one of his former friends being left in the great and lonely city. He walked along Piccadilly, and saw how many of the houses were shut up. The beautiful foliage of Green Park had vanished; here and there a red leaf hung on a withered branch. And yet, lonely as he felt in walking through this crowd of strangers, he was nevertheless possessed with a nervous and excited fear that at any moment he might have to quail before the inquiring glance of a certain pair of calm, large eyes. Was this, then, really Keith Macleod who was haunted by these fantastic troubles? Had he so little courage that he dared not go boldly up to her house, and hold out his hand to her? As he walked along this thoroughfare, he was looking far ahead; and when any tall and slender figure appeared that might by any possibility be taken for hers, he watched it with a nervous

interest that had something of dread in it. So much for the high courage born of love!

It was with some sense of relief that he entered Hyde Park, for here there were fewer people. And as he walked on, the day brightened. A warmer light began to suffuse the pale mist lying over the black-green masses of rhododendrons, the leafless trees, the damp grass plots, the empty chairs; and as he was regarding a group of people on horseback who, almost at the summit of the red hill, seemed about to disappear into the mist, behold! a sudden break in the sky; a silvery gleam shot athwart from the south, so that these distant figures grew almost black; and presently the frail sunshine of November was streaming all over the red ride and the raw green of the grass. His spirits rose somewhat. When he reached the Serpentine, the sunlight was shining on the rippling blue water; and there were pert young ladies of ten or twelve feeding the ducks; and away on the other side there was actually an island amid the blue ripples; and the island, if it was not as grand as Staffa nor as green as Ulva, was nevertheless

an island, and it was pleasant enough to look at, with its bushes, and boats, and white swans. And then he bethought him of his first walks by the side of this little lake—when Oscar was the only creature in London he had to concern himself with—when each new day was only a brighter holiday than its predecessor—when he was of opinion that London was the happiest and most beautiful place in the world. And of that bright morning, too, when he walked through the empty streets at dawn, and came to the peacefully flowing river.

These idle meditations were suddenly interrupted. Away along the bank of the lake his keen eye could make out a figure, which, even at that distance, seemed so much to resemble one he knew, that his heart began to beat quick. Then the dress—all of black, with a white hat and white gloves; was not that of the simplicity that had always so great an attraction for her? And he knew that she was singularly fond of Kensington Gardens; and might she not be going thither for a stroll before going back to the Piccadilly Theatre? He hastened his steps. He

soon began to gain on the stranger; and the nearer he got the more it seemed to him that he recognised the graceful walk and carriage of this slender woman. She passed under the archway of the bridge. When she had emerged from the shadow, she paused for a moment or two to look at the ducks on the lake; and this arch of shadow seemed to frame a beautiful sunlit picture—the single figure against a background of green bushes. And if this were indeed she, how splendid the world would all become in a moment! In his eagerness of anticipation, he forgot his fear. What would she say? Was he to hear her laugh once more? And take her hand? Alas! when he got close enough to make sure, he found that this beautiful figure belonged to a somewhat pretty, middle-aged lady, who had brought a bag of scraps with her to feed the ducks. The world grew empty again. He passed on, in a sort of dream. He only knew he was in Kensington Gardens; and that once or twice he had walked with her down those broad alleys in the happy summer time of flowers and sunshine and the scent of limes.

Now there was a pale blue mist in the open glades, and a gloomy purple instead of the brilliant green of the trees; and the cold wind that came across rustled the masses of brown and orange leaves that were lying scattered on the ground. He got a little more interested when he neared the Round Pond; for the wind had freshened, and there were several handsome craft out there on the raging deep, braving well the sudden squalls that laid them right on their beam-ends, and then let them come staggering and dripping up to the wind. But there were two small boys there who had brought with them a tiny vessel of home-made build, with a couple of lug-sails, a jib, and no rudder; and it was a great disappointment to them that this nondescript craft would move, if it moved at all, in an uncertain circle. Macleod came to their assistance—got a bit of floating stick, and carved out of it a rude rudder, altered the sails, and altogether put the ship into such sea-going trim that, when she was fairly launched, she kept a pretty good course for the other side, where doubtless she arrived in safety and discharged

her passengers and cargo. He was almost sorry to part with the two small shipowners. They seemed to him the only people he knew in London.

But surely he had not come all the way from Castle Dare to walk about Kensington Gardens? What had become of that intense longing to see her—to hear her speak—that had made his life at home a constant torment and misery? Well, it still held possession of him; but all the same there was this indefinable dread that held him back. Perhaps he was afraid that he would have to confess to her the true reason for his having come to London. Perhaps he feared he might find her something entirely different from the creature of his dreams. At all events, as he returned to his rooms and sat down by himself to think over all the things that might accrue from this step of his, he only got further and further into a haze of nervous indecision. One thing only was clear to him. With all his hatred and jealousy of the theatre, to the theatre that night he should have to go. He could not know that she was so near to him—that at a certain

time and place he could certainly see her and listen to her—without going. He bethought him, moreover, of what he had once heard her say—that while she could fairly well make out the people in the galleries and boxes, those who were sitting in the stalls close to the orchestra were, by reason of the glare of the footlights, quite invisible to her. Might he not, then, get into some corner where, himself unseen, he might be so near her that he could almost stretch out his hand to her, and take her hand, and tell by its warmth and throbbing that it was a real woman, and not a dream, that filled his heart?

Major Stewart was put off by some excuse; and at eight o'clock Macleod walked up to the theatre. He drew near with some apprehension; it almost seemed to him as though the man in the box-office recognised him; and knew the reason for his demanding one of those stalls. He got it easily enough; there was no great run on the new piece, even though Miss Gertrude White was the heroine. He made his way along the narrow corridors; he passed into the glare of the house; he took his seat with his ears dinned

by the loud music; and waited. He paid no heed to his neighbours; he had already twisted up the programme so that he could not have read it if he had wished; he was aware mostly of a sort of choking sensation about the throat.

When Gertrude White did appear—she came in unexpectedly—he almost uttered a cry; and it would have been a cry of delight. For there was the flesh-and-blood woman a thousand times more interesting, and beautiful, and lovable than all his fancied pictures of her. Look how she walks—how simply and gracefully she takes off her hat and places it on the table—look at the play of light and life and gladness on her face—at the eloquence of her eyes! He had been thinking of her eyes as too calmly observant and serious: he saw them now, and was amazed at the difference—they seemed to have so much clear light in them, and pleasant laughter. He did not fear at all that she should see him. She was so near—he wished he could take her hand, and lead her away. What concern had these people around with her? This was Gertrude

White—whom he knew. She was a friend of Mrs. Ross's; she lived in a quiet little home, with an affectionate and provoking sister; she had a great admiration for Oscar the collie; she had the whitest hand in the world as she offered you some salad at the small, neat table. What was she doing here—amid all this glaring sham—before all these people? "*Come away quickly!*" his heart cried to her. "*Quick—quick—let us get away together—there is some mistake—some illusion—outside you will breathe the fresh air and get into the reality of the world again—and you will ask about Oscar, and young Ogilvie—and one might hold your hand—your real warm hand—and perhaps hold it tight, and not give it up to any one whatsoever!*" His own hand was trembling with excitement. The eagerness of delight with which he listened to every word uttered by the low-toned and gentle voice was almost painful; and yet he knew it not. He was as one demented. This was Gertrude White—speaking, walking, smiling, a fire of beauty in her clear eyes, her parted lips when she laughed letting the brilliant light just touch for an instant

the milk-white teeth. This was no pale Roseleaf at all—no dream or vision—but the actual laughing, talking, beautiful woman, who had more than ever of that strange grace and witchery about her that had fascinated him when first he saw her. She was so near that he could have thrown a rose to her—a red rose full-blown and full-scented. He forgave the theatre—or rather he forgot it—in the unimaginable delight of being so near to her. And when at length she left the stage, he had no jealousy at all of the poor people who remained there to go through their marionette business. He hoped they might all become great actors and actresses. He even thought he would try to get to understand the story—seeing he should have nothing else to do until Gertrude White came back again.

Now Keith Macleod was no more ignorant or innocent than anybody else; but there was one social misdemeanour—a mere peccadillo, let us say—that was quite unintelligible to him. He could not understand how a man, a grown man, supposed to have some self-respect, could go

philandering after a married woman; and still less could he understand how a married woman should, instead of attending to her children and her house and such matters, make herself ridiculous by aping girlhood and pretending to have a lover. He had read a great deal about this; and he was told it was common; but he did not believe it. The same authorities assured him that the women of England were drunkards in secret; he did not believe it. The same authorities insisted that the sole notion of marriage that occupied the head of an English girl of our own day was as to how she should sell her charms to the highest bidder; he did not believe that either. And indeed he argued with himself, in considering to what extent books and plays could be trusted in such matters, that in one obvious case the absurdity of these allegations was proved. If France were the France of French playwrights and novelists, the whole business of the country would come to a standstill. If it was the sole and constant occupation of every adult Frenchman to run after his neighbour's wife, how could bridges be

built, taxes collected, fortifications planned? Surely a Frenchman must sometimes think—if only by accident—of something other than his neighbour's wife? Macleod laughed to himself in the solitude of Castle Dare, and contemptuously flung the unfinished paper-covered novel aside.

But what was his surprise and indignation—his shame, even—on finding that this very piece in which Gertrude White was acting, was all about a jealous husband, and a gay and thoughtless wife, and a villain, who did not at all silently plot her ruin, but frankly confided his aspirations to a mutual friend, and rather sought for sympathy; while she, Gertrude White herself, had, before all these people, to listen to advances which, in her innocence, she was not supposed to understand! As the play proceeded, his brows grew darker and darker. And the husband, who ought to have been the guardian of his wife's honour? Well, the husband in this rather poor play was a creation that is common in modern English drama. He represented one idea, at least, that the English playwright has certainly not

borrowed from the French stage. Moral worth is best indicated by a sullen demeanour. The man who has a pleasant manner is dangerous and a profligate: the virtuous man—the true-hearted Englishman—conducts himself as a boor, and proves the goodness of his nature by his silence and his sulks. The hero of this trumpery piece was of this familiar type. He saw the gay fascinator coming about his house; but he was too proud and dignified to interfere. He knew of his young wife becoming the by-word of his friends; but he only clasped his hands on his forehead—and sought solitude—and scowled as a man of virtue should. Macleod had paid bu little attention to stories of this kind when he had merely read them; but when the situation was visible—when actual people were before him—the whole thing looked more real, and his sympathies became active enough. How was it possible, he thought, for this poor dolt to fume and mutter, and let his innocent wife go her own way alone and unprotected, when there was a door in the room, and a window by way of alternative? There was one scene in which the

faithless friend and the young wife were together in her drawing-room. He drew nearer to her; he spoke softly to her; he ventured to take her hand. And while he was looking up appealingly to her, Macleod was regarding his face. He was calculating to himself the precise spot between the eyes where a man's knuckles would most effectually tell; and his hand was clenched; and his teeth set hard. There was a look on his face which would have warned any gay young man that when Macleod should marry his wife would need no second champion.

But was this the atmosphere by which she was surrounded? It is needless to say that the piece was proper enough. Virtue was triumphant; vice compelled to sneak off discomfited. The indignant outburst of shame and horror and contempt on the part of the young wife when she came to know what the villain's suave intentions really meant, gave Miss White an excellent opportunity of displaying her histrionic gifts; and the public applauded vehemently; but Macleod had no pride in her triumph. He was glad when the piece ended—when the honest-

hearted Englishman so far recovered speech as to declare that his confidence in his wife was restored, and so far forgot his stolidity of face and demeanour as to point out to the villain the way to the door instead of kicking him thither. Macleod breathed more freely when he knew that Gertrude White was now about to go away to the shelter and quiet of her own home. He went back to his rooms and tried to forget the precise circumstances in which he had just seen her.

But not to forget herself. A new gladness filled his heart when he thought of her—thought of her not now as a dream or a vision, but as the living and breathing woman whose musical laugh seemed still to be ringing in his ears. He could see her plainly—the face all charged with life and loveliness; the clear bright eyes that he had no longer any fear of meeting; the sweet mouth with its changing smiles. When Major Stewart came home that night, he noticed a most marked change in the manner of his companion. Macleod was excited, eager, talkative; full of high-spirits and friendliness; he joked his friend about his playing truant from his wife. He was anxious

to know all about the Major's adventures; and pressed him to have but one other cigar; and vowed that he would take him on the following evening to the only place in London where a good dinner could be had. There was gladness in his eyes; a careless satisfaction in his manner; he was ready to do anything, go anywhere. This was more like the Macleod of old. Major Stewart came to the conclusion that the atmosphere of London had had a very good effect on his friend's spirits.

When Macleod went to bed that night there were wild and glad desires and resolves in his brain that might otherwise have kept him awake but for the fatigue he had lately endured. He slept, and he dreamed; and the figure that he saw in his dreams—though she was distant somehow—had a look of tenderness in her eyes, and she held a red rose in her hand.

CHAPTER VII.

A DECLARATION.

NOVEMBER though it was, next morning broke brilliantly over London. There was a fresh west wind blowing; there was a clear sunshine filling the thoroughfares; if one were on the look-out for picturesqueness even in Bury Street, was there not a fine touch of colour where the softly red chimney-pots rose far away into the blue? It was not possible to have always around one the splendour of the northern seas.

And Macleod would not listen to a word his friend had to say concerning the important business that had brought them both to London.

"To-night, man—to-night—we will arrange it all to-night," he would say, and there was

a nervous excitement about his manner for which the Major could not at all account.

"Sha'n't I see you till the evening, then?" he asked.

"No," Macleod said, looking anxiously out of the window, as if he feared some thunder-storm would suddenly shut out the clear light of this beautiful morning. "I don't know—perhaps I may be back before—but at any rate we meet at seven. You will remember seven?"

"Indeed I am not likely to forget it," his companion said, for he had been told about five-and-thirty times.

It was close on eleven o'clock when Macleod left the house. There was a grateful freshness about the morning even here in the middle of London. People looked cheerful; Piccadilly was thronged with idlers come out to enjoy the sun shine; there was still a leaf or two fluttering on the trees in the squares. Why should this man go eagerly tearing away northward in a hansom—with an anxious and absorbed look on his face—when everybody seemed inclined

to saunter leisurely along, breathing the sweet wind, and feeling the sunlight on his cheek?

It was scarcely half past eleven when Macleod got out of the hansom, and opened a small gate, and walked up to the door of a certain house. He was afraid she had already gone. He was afraid she might resent his calling at so unusual an hour. He was afraid—of a thousand things. And when, at last, the trim maid-servant told him that Miss White was within and asked him to step into the drawing-room, it was almost as one in a dream that he followed her. As one in a dream, truly; but nevertheless he saw every object around him with a marvellous vividness. Next day he could recollect every feature of the room—the empty fire-place, the black-framed mirror, the Chinese fans, the small cabinets with their shelves of blue and white, and the large open book on the table, with a bit of tartan lying on it. These things seemed to impress themselves on his eyesight involuntarily; for he was in reality intently listening for a soft footfall outside the

door. He went forward to this open book. It was a volume of a work on the Highland clans —a large and expensive work that was not likely to belong to Mr. White. And this coloured figure? It was the representative of the Clan Macleod; and this bit of cloth that lay on the open book was of the Macleod tartan. He withdrew quickly, as though he had stumbled on some dire secret. He went to the window. He saw only leafless trees now, and withered flowers; with the clear sunshine touching the sides of houses and walls that had in the summer months been quite invisible.

There was a slight noise behind him; he turned, and all the room seemed filled with a splendour of light and of life as she advanced to him—the clear, beautiful eyes full of gladness, the lips smiling, the hand frankly extended. And of a sudden his heart sank. Was it indeed of her,

"The glory of life, the beauty of the world,"

that he had dared to dream wild and impossible dreams? He had set out that morning

with a certain masterful sense that he would face his fate. He had "taken the world for his pillow," as the Gaelic stories say. But at this sudden revelation of the incomparable grace and self-possession and high loveliness of this beautiful creature, all his courage and hopes fled instantly, and he could only stammer out excuses for his calling so early. He was eagerly trying to make himself out an ordinary visitor. He explained that he did not know but that she might be going to the theatre during the day. He was in London for a short time, on business. It was an unconscionable hour.

"But I am so glad to see you," she said, with a perfect sweetness, and her eyes said more than her words. "I should have been really vexed if I had heard you had passed through London without calling on us. Won't you sit down?"

As he sat down, she turned for a second, and without any embarrassment shut the big book that had been lying open on the table.

"It is very beautiful weather," she remarked—there was no tremor about *her* fingers, at all events, as she made secure the brooch that

fastened the simple morning dress at the neck; "only it seems a pity to throw away such beautiful sunshine on withered gardens and bare trees. We have some fine chrysanthemums, though; but I confess I don't like chrysanthemums myself. They come at the wrong time. They look unnatural. They only remind one of what is gone. If we are to have winter, we ought to have it out-and-out; the chrysanthemums always seem to me as if they were making a pretence—trying to make you believe that there was still some life in the dead garden."

It was very pretty talk all this about chrysanthemums, uttered in the low-toned, and gentle, and musical voice; but somehow there was a burning impatience in his heart—and a bitter sense of hopelessness—and he felt as though he would cry out in his despair. How could he sit there and listen to talk about chrysanthemums? His hands were tightly clasped together; his heart was throbbing quickly; there was a humming in his ears, as though something there refused to hear about chrysanthemums.

"I—I saw you at the theatre last night," said he.

Perhaps it was the abruptness of the remark that caused the quick blush. She lowered her eyes. But all the same she said, with perfect self-possession,

"Did you like the piece?"

And he, too: was he not determined to play the part of an ordinary visitor?

"I am not much of a judge," said he lightly. "The drawing-room scene is very pretty. It is very like a drawing-room. I suppose these are real curtains, and real pictures?"

"Oh, yes, it is all real furniture," said she.

Thereafter, for a second, blank silence. Neither dared to touch that deeper stage question that lay next their hearts. But when Keith Macleod, in many a word of timid suggestion, and in the jesting letter he sent her from Castle Dare, had ventured upon that dangerous ground, it was not to talk about the real furniture of a stage drawing-room. However, was not this an ordinary morning

call? His manner—his speech—everything said so but the tightly clasped hands, and perhaps too a certain intensity of look in the eyes, which seemed anxious and constrained.

"Papa, at least, is proud of our chrysanthemums," said Miss White, quickly getting away from the stage question. "He is in the garden now. Will you go out and see him? I am sorry Carry has gone to school."

She rose. He rose also, and he was about to lift his hat from the table, when he suddenly turned to her.

"A drowning man will cry out—how can you prevent his crying out?"

She was startled by the change in the sound of his voice, and still more by the almost haggard look of pain and entreaty in his eyes. He seized her hand; she would have withdrawn it, but she could not.

"You will listen. It is no harm to you. I must speak now, or I will die," said he quite wildly, "and if you think I am mad, perhaps you are right, but people have pity for a madman. Do you know why I have come to London? It

is, to see you. I could bear it no longer—the fire that was burning and killing me. Oh, it is no use my saying it is love for you—I do not know what it is—but only that I must tell you, and you cannot be angry with me—you can only pity me and go away. That is it—it is nothing to you—you can go away."

She burst into tears, and snatched her hand from him, and with both hands covered her face.

"Ah!" said he, "is it pain to you that I should tell you of this madness? But you will forgive me—and you will forget it—and it will not pain you to-morrow or any other day. Surely you are not to blame! Do you remember the days when we became friends?—it seems a long time ago, but they were beautiful days, and you were very kind to me, and I was glad I had come to London to make so kind a friend. And it was no fault of yours that I went away with that sickness of the heart; and how could you know about the burning fire, and the feeling that if I did not see you I might as well be dead? And I am come—and I see you—and

now I know no more what is to happen when I go away. And I will call you Gertrude for once only. Gertrude, sit down now—for a moment or two—and do not grieve any more over what is only a misfortune. I want to tell you. After I have spoken, I will go away, and there will be an end of the trouble."

She did sit down; her hands were clasped in piteous despair; he saw the tear-drops on the long beautiful lashes.

"And if the drowning man cries?" said he. "It is only a breath. The waves go over him, and the world is at peace. And oh! do you know, that I have taken a strange fancy of late—— But I will not trouble you with that; you may hear of it afterwards; you will understand, and know you have no blame, and there is an end of trouble. It is quite strange what fancies get into one's head when one is sick—heart-sick. Do you know what I thought this morning? Will you believe it? Will you let the drowning man cry out in his madness? Why, I said to myself, 'Up now, and have courage! Up now, and be brave,

and win a bride as they used to do in the old stories.' And it was you—it was you—my madness thought of. 'You will tell her,' I said to myself, 'of all the love and the worship you have for her, and your thinking of her by day and by night; and she is a woman, and she will have pity. And then in her surprise—why——' But then you came into the room—it is only a little while ago—but it seems for ever and ever away now—and I have only pained you——"

She sprang to her feet; her face white, her lips proud and determined. And for a second she put her hands on his shoulders; and the wet, full, piteous eyes met his. But as rapidly she withdrew them—almost shuddering—and turned away; and her hands were apart, each clasped, and she bowed her head. Gertrude White had never acted like that on any stage.

And as for him, he stood absolutely dazed for a moment, not daring to think what that involuntary action might mean. He stepped forward—with a pale face and a bewildered air—and caught her hand. Her face she

sheltered with the other, and she was sobbing bitterly.

"Gertrude," he said, "what is it? What do you mean?"

The broken voice answered, though her face was turned aside—

"It is I who am miserable."

"You who are miserable?"

She turned and looked fair into his face—with her eyes all wet, and beautiful, and piteous.

"Can't you see? Don't you understand?" she said. "Oh, my good friend! of all the men in the world, you are the very last I would bring trouble to. And I cannot be a hypocrite with you. I feared something of this; and now the misery is that I cannot say to you, 'Here, take my hand. It is yours. You have won your bride.' I cannot do it. If we were both differently situated—it might be otherwise——"

"It might be otherwise!" he exclaimed, with a sudden wonder. "Gertrude, what do you mean? Situated? Is it only that? Look me in the face, now, and as you are a true woman

tell me—if we were both free from all situation—if there were no difficulties—nothing to be thought of—could you give yourself to me? Would you really become my wife—you who have all the world flattering you?"

She dared not look him in the face. There was something about the vehemence of his manner that almost terrified her. But she answered bravely, in the sweet, low, trembling voice, and with downcast eyes—

"If I were to become the wife of any one, it is your wife I would like to be; and I have thought of it. Oh, I cannot be a hypocrite with you when I see the misery I have brought you! And I have thought of giving up all my present life, and all the wishes and dreams I have cherished, and going away and living the simple life of a woman. And under whose guidance would I try that rather than yours? You made me think. But it is all a dream—a fancy. It is impossible. It would only bring misery to you and to me——"

"But why—but why?" he eagerly exclaimed; and there was a proud light in his face.

"Gertrude, if you can say so much, why not say all? What are obstacles? There can be none if you have the fiftieth part of the love for me that I have for you! Obstacles!"—and he laughed with a strange laugh.

She looked up in his face.

"And would it be so great a happiness for you? That would make up for all the trouble I have brought you?" she said, wistfully; and his answer was to take both her hands in his, and there was such a joy in his heart that he could not speak at all. But she only shook her head, somewhat sadly, and withdrew her hands, and sat down again by the table.

"It is wrong of me even to think of it," she said. "To-day I might say 'yes;' and to-morrow? You might inspire me with courage now; and afterwards—I should only bring you further pain. I do not know myself. I could not be sure of myself. How could I dare drag you into such a terrible risk? It is better as it is. The pain you are suffering will go. You will come to call me your friend; and you will thank me that I refused. Perhaps I shall suffer

a little too," she added, and once more she rather timidly looked up into his face. "You do not know the fascination of seeing your scheme of life, that you have been dreaming about, just suddenly put before you for acceptance; and you want all your common sense to hold back. But I know it will be better—better for both us. You must believe me."

"I do not believe you, and I will not believe you," said he, proudly, "and now you have said so much I am not going to take any refusal at all. Not now. Gertrude, I have courage for both of us; when you are timid, you will take my hand. Say it, then! A word only! You have already said all but that!"

He seemed scarcely the same man who had appealed to her with the wild eyes and the haggard face. His look was radiant and proud. He spoke with a firm voice; and yet there was a great tenderness in his tone.

"I am sure you love me," she said in a low voice.

"You will see," he rejoined, with a firm confidence.

"And I am not going to requite your love ill. You are too vehement. You think of nothing but the one end to it all. But I am a woman, and women are taught to be patient. Now you must let me think about all you have said."

"And you do not quite refuse?" said he.

She hesitated for a moment or two.

"I must think for you as well as for myself," she said, in a scarcely audible voice. "Give me time. Give me till the end of the week."

"At this hour I will come."

"And you will believe I have decided for the best—that I have tried hard to be fair to you as well as myself?"

"I know you are too true a woman for anything else," he said; and then he added, "Ah, well, now, you have had enough misery for one morning—you must dry your eyes now, and we will go out into the garden—and if I am not to say anything of all my gratitude to you—why? Because I hope there will be many a year to do that in!"

She went to fetch a light shawl and a hat; he kept turning over the things on the table, his

fingers trembling, his eyes seeing nothing. If they did see anything it was a vision of the brown moors near Castle Dare, and a beautiful creature, clad all in cream-colour and scarlet, drawing near the great grey stone house.

She came into the room again; joy leapt to his eyes.

"Will you follow me?"

There was a strangely subdued air about her manner as she led him to where her father was; perhaps she was rather tired after the varied emotions she had experienced; perhaps she was still anxious. He was not anxious. It was in a glad way that he addressed the old gentleman who stood there with a spade in his hand.

"It is indeed a beautiful garden," Macleod said—looking round on the withered leaves and damp soil—"no wonder you look after it yourself."

"I am not gardening," the old man said peevishly. "I have been putting a knife in the ground—burying the hatchet, you might call it. Fancy! A man sees an old hunting-

knife in a shop in Gloucester; a hunting-knife of the time of Charles I., with a beautifully carved ivory handle; and he thinks he will make a present of it to me. What does he do but go and have it ground and sharpened and polished until it looks like something sent from Sheffield the day before yesterday!"

"You ought to be very pleased, papa, you got it at all," said Gertrude White; but she was looking elsewhere—and rather absently too.

"And so you have buried it to restore the tone?"

"I have," said the old gentleman, marching off with the shovel to a sort of outhouse.

Macleod speedily took his leave.

"Saturday next at noon," said he to her, with no timidity in his voice.

"Yes," said she, more gently, and with downcast eyes.

He walked away from the house—he knew not whither. He saw nothing around him. He walked hard, sometimes talking to himself. In the afternoon he found himself in a village in Berkshire, close by which, fortunately, there

was a railway station; and he had just time to get back to keep his appointment with Major Stewart.

They sat down to dinner.

"Come now, Macleod, tell me where you have been all day," said the rosy-faced soldier, carefully tucking his napkin under his chin.

Macleod burst out laughing.

"Another day—another day, Stewart, I will tell you all about it. It is the most ridiculous story you ever heard in your life!"

It was a strange sort of laughing, for there were tears in the younger man's eyes. But Major Stewart was too busy to notice; and presently they began to talk about the real and serious object of their expedition to London.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RED ROSE.

FROM nervous and unreasoning dread to overweening and extravagant confidence there was but a single bound. After the timid confession she had made, how could he have any further fear? He knew now the answer she must certainly give him. What but the one word "*yes*"—musical as the sound of summer seas—could fitly close and atone for all that long period of doubt and despair? And would she murmur it with the low, sweet voice, or only look it with the clear and lambent eyes? Once uttered, anyhow, surely the glad message would instantly wing its flight away to the far north; and Colonsay would hear; and the green shores of Ulva would laugh; and through all the wild dashing and roaring of the seas there would be a soft ringing as of wedding-bells. The

Gometra men will have a good glass that night; and who will take the news to distant Fladda and rouse the lonely Dutchman from his winter sleep? There is a bride coming to Castle Dare!

When Norman Ogilvie had even mentioned marriage, Macleod had merely shaken his head and turned away. There was no issue that way from the wilderness of pain and trouble into which he had strayed. She was already wedded—to that cruel art that was crushing the woman within her. Her ways of life and his were separated as though by unknown oceans. And how was it possible that so beautiful a woman—surrounded by people who petted and flattered her—should not already have her heart engaged? Even if she were free, how could she have bestowed a thought on him—a passing stranger—a summer visitor—the acquaintance of an hour?

But no sooner had Gertrude White, to his sudden wonder, and joy, and gratitude, made that stammering confession, than the impetuosity of his passion leapt at once to the goal. He would not hear of any obstacles. He would not

look at them. If she would but take his hand, he would lead her and guard her, and all would go well. And it was to this effect that he wrote to her day after day, pouring out all the confidences of his heart to her, appealing to her, striving to convey to her something of his own high courage and hope. Strictly speaking, perhaps, it was not quite fair that he should thus have disturbed the calm of her deliberation. Had he not given her till the end of the week to come to a decision? But when in his eagerness he thought of some further reason, some further appeal, how could he remain silent? With the prize so near, he could not let it slip from his grasp through the consideration of niceties of conduct. By rights he ought to have gone up to Mr. White and begged for permission to pay his addresses to the old gentleman's daughter. He forgot all about that. He forgot that Mr. White was in existence. All his thinking from morning till night—and through much of the night too—was directed on her answer—the one small word filled with a whole worldful of light and joy.

"Say but this one word," he wrote to her, "then everything else becomes a mere trifle. If there are obstacles and troubles and what not, we will meet them one by one, and dispose of them. There can be no obstacles, if we are of one mind; and we shall be of one mind sure enough, if you will say you will become my wife; for there is nothing I will not consent to; and I shall only be too glad to have opportunities of showing my great gratitude to you for the sacrifice you must make. I speak of it as a sacrifice; but I do not believe it is one—whatever you may think now—and whatever natural regret you may feel—you will grow to feel there was no evil done you when you were drawn away from the life that now surrounds you. And if you were to say, 'I will become your wife only on one condition—that I am not asked to abandon my career as an actress,' still I would say, 'Become my wife.' Surely matters of arrangement are mere trifles—after you have given me your promise. And when you have placed your hand in mine (and the motto of the Macleods is *Hold Fast*) we can study con-

ditions, and obstacles, and the other nonsense that our friends are sure to suggest, at our leisure. I think I already hear you say 'Yes;' I listen and listen until I almost hear your voice. And if it is to be 'Yes,' will you wear a red rose in your dress on Saturday? I shall see that before you speak. I will know what your message is, even if there are people about. One red rose only."

"Macleod," said Major Stewart to him, "did you come to London to write love-letters?"

"Love-letters!" he said, angrily; but then he laughed. "And what did you come to London for?"

"On a highly philanthropic errand," said the other, gravely, "which I hope to see fulfilled to-morrow. And if we have a day or two to spare, that is well enough, for one cannot be always at work; but I did not expect to take a holiday in the company of a man who spends three-fourths of the day at a writing-desk."

"Nonsense," said Macleod, though there was some tell-tale colour in his face. "All the

writing I have done to-day would not fill up twenty minutes. And if I am a dull companion, is not Norman Ogilvie coming to dinner to-night to amuse you?"

While they were speaking a servant brought in a card.

"Ask the gentleman to come up," Macleod said, and then he turned to his companion. "What an odd thing! I was speaking to you a minute ago about that drag accident. And here is Beaureguard himself."

The tall, rough-visaged man—stooping slightly as though he thought the doorway was a trifle low—came forward and shook hands with Macleod, and was understood to inquire about his health, though what he literally said was, "Hawya, Macleod, hawya?"

"I heard you were in town from Paulton—you remember Paulton who dined with you at Richmond. He saw you in a hansom yesterday; and I took my chance of finding you in your old quarters. What are you doing in London?"

Macleod briefly explained.

"And you?" he asked, "what has brought

you to London? I thought you and Lady Beauregard were in Ireland."

"We have just come over, and go down to Weatherill to-morrow. Won't you come down and shoot a pheasant or two before you return to the Highlands?"

"Well, the fact is," Macleod said, hesitatingly, "my friend and I—by the way, let me introduce you—Lord Beauregard, Major Stewart—the fact is, we ought to go back directly after we have settled this business."

"But a day or two won't matter. Now, let me see. The Suffields come to us on Monday next, I think. We could get up a party for you on the Tuesday; and if your friend will come with you, we shall be six guns, which I always think the best number."

The gallant Major showed no hesitation whatever. The chance of blazing away at a whole atmosphereful of pheasants—for so he construed the invitation—did not often come in his way.

"I am quite sure a day or two won't make any difference," said he, quickly. "In any case

we are not thinking of going till Monday, and that would only mean an extra day."

"Very well," Macleod said.

"Then you will come down to dinner on the Monday evening. I will see if there is any alteration in the trains, and drop you a note with full instructions. Is it a bargain?"

"It is."

"All right. I must be off now. Good-bye."

Major Stewart jumped to his feet with great alacrity, and warmly shook hands with the departing stranger. Then, when the door was shut, he went through a pantomimic expression of bringing down innumerable pheasants from every corner of the ceiling—with an occasional aim at the floor, where an imaginary hare was scurrying by.

"Macleod, Macleod," said he, "you are a trump. You may go on writing love-letters from now till next Monday afternoon. I suppose we shall have a good dinner too?"

"Beauregard is said to have the best *chef* in London; and I don't suppose he would leave so important a person in Ireland."

"You have my gratitude, Macleod—eternal, sincere, unbounded," the Major said seriously.

"But it is not I who am asking you to go and massacre a lot of pheasants," said Macleod; and he spoke rather absently, for he was thinking of the probable mood in which he would go down to Weatherill. One of a generous gladness and joy, the outward expression of an eager and secret happiness to be known by none? Or what if there were no red rose at all on her bosom when she advanced to meet him with sad eyes?

They went down into Essex next day. Major Stewart was surprised to find that his companion talked not so much about the price of machines for drying saturated crops, as about the conjectural cost of living in the various houses they saw from afar, set amid the leafless trees of November.

"You don't think of coming to live in England, do you?" said he.

"No—at least, not at present," Macleod said. "Of course, one never knows what may turn up. I don't propose to live at Dare all my life."

"Your wife might want to live in England," the Major said coolly.

Macleod started and stared.

"You have been writing a good many letters of late," said his companion.

"And is that all?" said Macleod, answering him in the Gaelic. "You know the proverb—*Tossing the head will not make the boat row.* I am not married yet."

The result of this journey was, that they agreed to purchase one of the machines for transference to the rainy regions of Mull; and then they returned to London. This was on a Wednesday. Major Stewart considered they had a few days to idle by before the *battue;* Macleod was only excitedly aware that Thursday and Friday—two short November days—came between him and that decision which he regarded with an anxious joy.

The two days went by in a sort of dream. A pale fog hung over London; and as he wandered about he saw the tall houses rise faintly blue into the grey mist; and the great coffee-coloured river, flushed with recent rains, rolled down

between the pale embankments; and the golden-red globe of the sun, occasionally becoming visible through the mottled clouds, sent a ray of fire here and there on some street-lamp or window-pane.

In the course of his devious wanderings—for he mostly went about alone—he made his way, with great trouble and perplexity, to the court in which the mother of Johnny Wickes lived; and he betrayed no shame at all in confronting the poor woman—half starved, and pale, and emaciated as she was—whose child he had stolen. It was in a tone of quite gratuitous pleasantry that he described to her how the small lad was growing brown and fat; and he had the audacity to declare to her that as he proposed to pay the boy the sum of one shilling per week at present, he might as well hand over to her the three months' pay which he had already earned. And the woman was so amused at the notion of little Johnny Wickes being able to earn anything at all, that, when she received the money, and looked at it, she burst out crying; and she had so little of the spirit of the British

nature, and so little regard for the laws of her country, that she invoked Heaven knows what—Heaven does know what—blessings on the head of the very man who had carried her child into slavery.

"And the first time I am going over to Oban," said he, "I will take him with me, and I will get a photograph of him made, and I will send it to you. And did you get the rabbits?" said he.

"Yes, indeed, sir, I got the rabbits."

"And it is a very fine poacher your son promises to be, for he got every one of the rabbits with his own snare, though I think it was old Hamish who showed him how to use it. I will say good-bye to you now."

The poor woman seemed to hesitate for a second.

"If there was any sewing," said she, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, "that I could do for your good lady, sir——"

"But I am not married," said he quickly.

"Ah, well, indeed, sir," she said with a sigh.

"But if there is any lace, or sewing, or any-

thing like that you can send to my mother, I have no doubt she will pay you for it as well as any one else——"

"I was not thinking of paying, sir; but to show you I am not ungrateful," was the answer —and if she said *hungrateful,* what matter? She was a woman without spirit; she had sold away her son.

From this dingy court he made his way round to Covent Garden Market, and he went into a florist's shop there.

"I want a bouquet," said he to the neat-handed maiden who looked up at him.

"Yes, sir," said she; "will you look at those in the window?"

"But I want one," said he, "with a single rose—a red rose—in the centre."

This proposition did not find favour in the eyes of the mild-mannered artist, who explained to him that something more important and ornate was necessary in the middle of a bouquet. He could have a circle of rosebuds, if he liked, outside; and a great white lily or camellia in the centre. He could have—this thing and the

other; she showed him how she could combine the features of one bouquet with those of the next. But the tall Highlander remained obdurate.

"Yes," said he, "I think you are quite right. You are quite right, I am sure. But it is this I would rather have—only one red rose in the centre, and you can make the rest what you like, only I think if they were smaller flowers, and all white, that would be better."

"Very well," said the young lady with a pleasing smile (she was rather good-looking herself), "I will try what I can do for you if you don't mind waiting. Will you take a chair?"

He was quite amazed by the dexterity with which those nimble fingers took from one cluster and another cluster the very flowers he would himself have chosen; and by the rapid fashion in which they were dressed, fitted, and arranged. The work of art grew apace.

"But you must have something to break the white," said she, smiling, "or it will look too like a bride's bouquet," and with that—almost in

the twinkling of an eye—she had put a circular line of dark purple-blue through the cream-white blossoms. It was a splendid rose that lay in the midst of all that beauty.

"What price would you like to give, sir?" the gentle Phyllis had said at the very outset. "Half a guinea—fifteen shillings?"

"Give me a beautiful rose," said he, "and I do not mind what the price is."

And at last the lace-paper was put round; and a little further trimming and setting took place; and finally the bouquet was swathed in soft white wool and put into a basket.

"Shall I take the address?" said the young lady, no doubt expecting that he would write it on the back of one of his cards. But no. He dictated the address; and then laid down the money. The astute young person was puzzled—perhaps disappointed.

"Is there no message, sir?" said she:—"no card?"

"No; but you must be sure to have it delivered to-night."

"It shall be sent off at once," said she, pro-

bably thinking that this was a very foolish young man who did not know the ways of the world. The only persons of whom she had any experience who sent bouquets without a note or a letter were husbands, who were either making up a quarrel with their wives or going to the opera, and she had observed on such occasions that the difference between twelve-and-sixpence and fifteen shillings was regarded and considered.

He slept but little that night; and next morning he got up nervous and trembling—like a drunken man—with half the courage and confidence, that had so long sustained him, gone. Major Stewart went out early. He kept pacing about the room until the frightfully slow half-hours went by; he hated the clock on the mantelpiece. And then, by a strong effort of will, he delayed starting until he should barely have time to reach her house by twelve o'clock, so that he should have the mad delight of eagerly wishing the hansom had a still more furious speed. He had chosen his horse well. It wanted five minutes to the appointed hour when he arrived at the house.

Did this trim maid-servant know? Was there anything of welcome in the demure smile? He followed her; his face was pale, though he knew it not; in the dusk of the room he was left alone.

But what was this—on the table? He almost uttered a cry as his bewildered eyes fixed themselves on it. The very bouquet he had sent the previous evening; and behold—behold! the red rose wanting! And then, at the same moment, he turned; and there was a vision of something all in white—that came to him timidly—all in white but for the red star of love shining there. And she did not speak at all; but she buried her head in his bosom; and he held her hands tight.

And now what will Ulva say; and the lonely shores of Fladda; and the distant Dutchman roused from his winter sleep amid the wild waves? Far away over the white sands of Iona—and the sunlight must be shining there now—there is many a sacred spot fit for the solemn plighting of lovers' vows; and if there is any organ wanted, what more noble than the vast Atlantic rollers booming into the Bourg and

Gribun caves? Surely they must know already; for the sea-birds have caught the cry; and there is a sound all through the glad rushing of the morning seas like the sound of wedding-bells. *There is a bride coming to Castle Dare*—the islands listen; and the wild sea calls again; and the green shores of Ulva grow greener still in the sunlight. There is a bride coming to Castle Dare; and the bride is dressed all in white—only she wears a red rose.

CHAPTER IX.

ENTHUSIASMS.

She was seated alone, her arms on the table, her head bent down. There was no red rose now in the white morning dress, for she had given it to him when he left. The frail November sunshine streamed into the room and put a shimmer of gold on the soft brown of her hair.

It was a bold step she had taken without counsel of any one. Her dream was now to give up everything that she had hitherto cared about, and to go away into private life to play the part of Lady Bountiful. And if doubts about the strength of her own resolution occasionally crossed her mind, could she not appeal for aid and courage to him who would always be by her side? When she became a Macleod she would have to accept the

motto of the Macleods. That motto is *Hold Fast.*

She heard her sister come into the house, and she raised her head. Presently Carry opened the door: and it was clear she was in high spirits.

"Oh, Mopsy," said she—and this was a pet name she gave her sister only when the latter was in great favour—"did you ever see such a morning in November? Don't you think papa might take us to Kew Gardens?"

"I wan't to speak to you, Carry—come here," she said gravely; and the younger sister went and stood by the table. "You know you and I are thrown very much on each other; and we ought to have no secrets from each other; and we ought to be always quite sure of each other's sympathy. Now, Carry, you must be patient, you must be kind; if I don't get sympathy from you, from whom should I get it?"

Carry withdrew a step, and her manner instantly changed. Gertrude White was a very clever actress; but she had never been able to impose on her younger sister. This imploring

look was all very fine; this appeal for sympathy was pathetic enough; but both only awakened Carry's suspicions. In their ordinary talk sisters rarely use such formal words as "sympathy."

"What do you mean?" said she, sharply.

"There—already!" exclaimed the other, apparently in deep disappointment. "Just when I most need your kindness and sympathy you show yourself most unfeeling——"

"I wish you would tell me what it is all about," Carry said impatiently.

The elder sister lowered her eyes, and her fingers began to work with a paper-knife that was lying there. Perhaps this was only a bit of stage-business; or perhaps she was apprehensive about the effect of her announcement.

"Carry," she said in a low voice, "I have promised to marry Sir Keith Macleod."

Carry uttered a quick cry of horror and surprise; but this, too, was only a bit of stage-effect, for she had fully anticipated the disclosure.

"Well, Gertrude White!" said she, apparently when she had recovered her breath. "Well—I—I—I—never——"

Her language was not as imposing as her gestures; but then nobody had written the part for her; whereas her very tolerable acting was nature's own gift.

"Now, Carry, be reasonable—don't be angry—what is the use of being vexed with what is past recalling? Any other sister would have been glad at such a time——" these were the hurried and broken sentences with which the culprit sought to stave off the coming wrath. But, oddly enough, Miss Carry refrained from denunciations or any other stormy expression of her anger and scorn. She suddenly assumed a cold and critical air.

"I suppose," said she, "before you allowed Sir Keith Macleod to ask you to become his wife, you explained to him our circumstances?"

"I don't understand you."

"You told him, of course, that you had a ne'er-do-well brother in Australia, who might

at any moment appear and disgrace the whole family?"

"I told him nothing of the kind. I had no opportunity of going into family affairs. And if I had—what has Tom got to do with Sir Keith Macleod? I had forgotten his very existence—no wonder, after eight years of absolute silence."

But Carry, having fired this shot, was off after other ammunition.

"You told him you have had several sweethearts before?"

"No, I did not," said Miss Gertrude White, warmly, "because it isn't true."

"What?—Mr. Howson?"

"The orchestra-leader in a provincial theatre!"

"Oh yes, but you did not speak so contemptuously of him then. Why, you made him believe he was another Mendelssohn; and, what is more, Gertrude White, you made him believe that you and he were engaged."

"You are talking nonsense," said the other, frowning, and with her head turned aside.

"And Mr. Brook—you no doubt told him that Mr. Brook called on papa, and asked him to go down to Doctors' Commons and see for himself what money he would have——"

"And what then? How can I prevent an idiotic boy, who chooses to turn me into a heroine, from making a fool of himself?"

"Oh, Gertrude White," said Carry, solemnly. "Will you sit there and tell me you gave him no encouragement?"

"This is mere folly," the elder sister said petulantly, as she rose, and proceeded to put straight a few of the things about the room. "I had hoped better things of you, Carry. I tell you of an important step I have taken in my life, and you bring out a lot of tattle and nonsense. However, I can act for myself. It is true, I had imagined something different. When I marry, of course we shall be separated. I had looked forward to the pleasure of showing you my new home——"

"Where is it to be?"

"Wherever my husband wishes it to be," she

answered proudly; but there was a conscious flush of colour in her face as she uttered—for the first time—that word.

"In the Highlands, I suppose, for he is not rich enough to have two houses," said Carry, which showed that she had been pondering over this matter before. "And he has already got his mother and his old maid sister, or whatever she is, in the house—you will make a pretty family."

This was a cruel thrust. When Macleod had spoken of the far home overlooking the northern seas, what could be more beautiful than his picture of the noble and silver-haired dame and of the gentle and loving cousin who was the friend and counsellor of the poor people around? And when he had suggested that some day or other Mr. White might bring his daughter to these remote regions to see all the wonders and splendours of them, he told her how the beautiful mother would take her to this place and to that place, and how that Janet Macleod would pet and befriend her, and perhaps teach her a few words of the Gaelic that she might have a

kindly phrase for the passer-by. But this picture of Carry's——: a houseful of wrangling women!

If she had had her will just then, she would instantly have recalled Macleod, and placed his courage and careless confidence between her and this cruel criticism. She had never, in truth, thought of these things. His pertinacity would not allow her. He had kept insisting that the only point for her to consider was whether she had sufficient love for him to enable her to answer his great love for her with the one word "Yes." Thereafter, according to his showing, everything else was a mere trifle. Obstacles, troubles, delays?—he would hear of nothing of the sort. And although, while he was present, she had been inspired by something of this confident feeling, now when she was attacked in his absence she felt herself defenceless.

"You may be as disagreeable as you like, Carry," said she, almost wearily. "I cannot help it. I never could understand your dislike to Sir Keith Macleod——"

"Cannot you understand," said the younger

sister with some show of indignation, "that if you are to marry at all I should like to see you marry an Englishman, instead of a great Highland savage, who thinks about nothing but beasts' skins? And why should you marry at all, Gertrude White? I suppose he will make you leave the theatre; and instead of being a famous woman, whom everybody admires and talks about, you will be plain Mrs. Nobody, hidden away in some place, and no one will ever hear of you again! Do you know what you are doing? Did you ever hear of any woman making such a fool of herself before?"

So far from being annoyed by this strong language the elder sister seemed quite pleased.

"Do you know, Carry, I like to hear you talk like that," she said with a smile. "You almost persuade me that I am not asking him for too great a sacrifice, after all——"

"A sacrifice! On his part!" exclaimed the younger sister, and then she added with decision, "But it sha'n't be, Gertrude White! I will go to papa!"

"Pardon me," said the elder sister, who was

nearer the door, "you need not trouble yourself; I am going now."

She went into the small room which was called her father's study, but which was in reality a sort of museum. She closed the door behind her.

"I have just had the pleasure of an interview with Carry, papa," she said, with a certain bitterness of tone, "and she has tried hard to make me as miserable as I can be. If I am to have another dose of it from you, papa, I may as well have it at once I have promised to marry Sir Keith Macleod."

She sank down in an easy-chair. There was a look on her face which plainly said, "Now do your worst; I cannot be more wretched than I am."

"You have promised to marry Sir Keith Macleod?" he repeated slowly, and fixing his eyes on her face.

He did not break into any rage, and accuse Macleod of treachery or her of filial disobedience. He knew that she was familiar with that kind of thing on the stage. What he had to deal with was the immediate future, not the past.

"Yes," she answered.

"Well," he said, with the same deliberation of tone, "I suppose you have not come to me for advice, since you have acted so far for yourself. If I were to give you advice, however, it would be to break your promise as soon as you decently can, both for his sake and for your own."

"I thought you would say so," she said with a sort of desperate mirth. "I came to have all my wretchedness heaped on me at once. It is a very pleasing sensation. I wonder if I could express it on the stage—that would be making use of my new experiences—as you have taught me——"

But here she burst into tears; and then got up and walked impatiently about the room; and finally dried her eyes, with shame and mortification visible on her face.

"What have *you* to say to me, papa? I am a fool to mind what a school-girl says."

"I don't know that I have anything to say," he observed calmly. "You know your own feelings best."

And then he regarded her attentively.

"I suppose when you marry you will give up the stage?"

"I suppose so," she said in a low voice.

"I should doubt," he said with quite a dispassionate air, "your being able to play one part for a lifetime. You might get tired—and that would be awkward for your husband and yourself. I don't say anything about your giving up all your prospects, although I had great pride in you and a still greater hope. That is for your own consideration. If you think you will be happier—if you are sure you will have no regret—if, as I say, you think you can play the one part for a lifetime—well and good."

"And you are right," she said bitterly, "to speak of me as an actress, and not as a human being. I must be playing a part to the end, I suppose? Perhaps so. Well, I hope I shall please my smaller audience as well as I seem to have pleased the bigger one."

Then she altered her tone.

"I told you, papa, the other day of my having seen that child run over and brought back to the woman who was standing on the pavement."

"Yes," said he; but wondering why this incident should be referred to at such a moment.

"I did not tell you the truth—at least, the whole truth. When I walked away, what was I thinking of? I caught myself trying to recall the way in which the woman threw her arms up when she saw the dead body of her child, and I was wondering whether I could repeat it. And then I began to ask myself whether I was a devil—or a woman."

"Bah!" said he. "That is a craze you have at present. You have had fifty others before. What I am afraid of is that, at the instigation of some such temporary fad, you will take a step that you will find irrevocable. The weak point about you is that you can make yourself believe anything. Just think over it, Gerty. If you leave the stage, you will destroy many a hope I had formed; but that doesn't matter. Whatever is most for your happiness—that is the only point."

"And so you have given me your congratulations, papa," she said, rising. "I have been so thoroughly trained to be an actress that,

when I marry, I shall only go from one stage to another."

"That was only a figure of speech," said he.

"At all events," she said, "I shall not be vexed by petty jealousies of other actresses, and I shall cease to be worried and humiliated by what they say about me in the provincial newspapers."

"As for the newspapers," he retorted, "you have little to complain of. They have treated *you* very well. And even if they annoyed you by a phrase here or there, surely the remedy is simple. You need not read them. You don't require any recommendation to the public now. As for your jealousy of other actresses—that was always an unreasonable vexation on your part——"

"Yes, and that only made it the more humiliating to myself," said she quickly.

"But think of this," said he. "You are married. You have been long away from the scene of your former triumphs. Some day you go to the theatre; and you find as the favourite of the public a woman who, you can see, cannot

come near to what you used to do. And I suppose you won't be jealous of her, and anxious to defeat her on the old ground?"

She winced a little; but she said—

"I can do with that as you suggested about the newspapers: I need not go to the theatre."

"Very well, Gerty. I hope all will be for the best. But do not be in a hurry; take time and consider."

She saw clearly enough that this calm acquiescence was all the congratulation or advice she was likely to get; and she went to the door.

"Papa," said she, with a little hesitation, "Sir Keith Macleod is coming up to-morrow morning—to go to church with us."

"Yes?" said he indifferently.

"He may speak to you before we go."

"Very well. Of course, I have nothing to say in the matter. You are mistress of your own actions."

She went to her own room, and locked herself in, feeling very lonely, and disheartened, and miserable. There was more to alarm her in her father's faintly expressed doubts than in all

Carry's vehement opposition and taunts. Why had Macleod left her alone?—If only she could see him laugh, her courage would be reassured.

Then she bethought her that this was not a fit mood for one who had promised to be the wife of a Macleod. She went to the mirror and regarded herself; and almost unconsciously an expression of pride and resolve appeared about the lines of her mouth. And she would show to herself that she had still a woman's feelings by going out and doing some actual work of charity: she would prove to herself that the constant simulation of noble emotions had not deadened them in her own nature. She put on her hat and shawl, and went down stairs, and went out into the free air and the sunlight—without a word to Carry or her father. She was trying to imagine herself as having already left the stage and all its fictitious allurements. She was now Lady Bountiful: having looked after the simple cares of her household she was now ready to cast her eyes abroad and relieve in so far as she might the distress around her. The first object of charity she encountered was an old crossing-sweeper.

She addressed him in a matter-of-fact way which was intended to conceal her fluttering self-consciousness. She inquired whether he had a wife; whether he had any children; whether they were not rather poor. And having been answered in the affirmative on all these points, she surprised the old man by giving him five shillings and telling him to go home and get a good warm dinner for his family. She passed on, and did not observe that, as soon as her back was turned, the old wretch made straight for the nearest public-house.

But her heart was happy and her courage rose. It was not for nothing, then, that she had entertained the bold resolve of casting aside for ever the one great ambition of her life—with all its intoxicating successes, and hopes, and struggles—for the homely and simple duties of an ordinary woman's existence. It was not in vain that she had read and dreamed of the far romantic land, and had ventured to think of herself as the proud wife of Macleod of Dare. Those fierce deeds of valour and vengeance that had terrified and thrilled her would now become part of her own

inheritance; why, she could tell her friends, when they came to see her, of all the old legends and fairy stories that belonged to her own home. And the part of Lady Bountiful—surely, if she must play some part, that was the one she would most dearly like to play. And the years would go by; and she would grow silver-haired too; and when she lay on her deathbed she would take her husband's hand and say, "Have I lived the life you wished me to live?" Her cheerfulness grew apace; and the walking, and the sunshine, and the fresh air brought a fine light and colour to her eyes and cheeks. There was a song singing through her head: and it was all about the brave Glenogie who rode up the king's ha'.

But as she turned the corner of a street her eye rested on a huge coloured placard—rested but for a moment, for she would not look on the gaudy thing. Just at this time a noble lord had shown his interest in the British drama by spending an enormous amount of money in producing, at a theatre of his own building, a spectacular burlesque, the gorgeousness of

which surpassed anything that had ever been done in that way. And the lady who appeared to be playing (in silence, mostly) the chief part in this hash of glaring colour and roaring music and clashing armour had gained a great celebrity by reason of her handsome figure, and the splendour of her costume, and the magnificence of the real diamonds that she wore. All London was talking of her; and the vast theatre—even in November—was nightly crammed to overflowing. As Gertrude White walked back to her home her heart was filled with bitterness. She had caught sight of the ostentatious placard; and she knew that the photograph of the actress who was figuring there was in every stationer's shop in the Strand. And that which galled her was not that the theatre should be so taken and so used, but that the stage heroine of the hour should be a woman who could act no more than any baboon in the Zoological Gardens.

CHAPTER X.

IN SUSSEX.

BUT as for him, there was no moderation at all in the vehemence of his joy. In the surprise and bewilderment of it, the world around him underwent transfiguration: London in November was glorified into an earthly paradise. The very people in the streets seemed to have kindly faces; Bury Street, St. James's—which is usually a somewhat misty thoroughfare—was more beautiful than the rose-garden of an eastern king. And on this Saturday afternoon the blue skies did indeed continue to shine over the great city; and the air seemed sweet and clear enough, as it generally does to any one whose every heart-beat is only another throb of conscious gladness.

In this first intoxication of wonder, and pride,

and gratitude, he had forgotten all about the ingenious theories which, in former days, he had constructed to prove to himself that Gertrude White should give up her present way of life. Was it true, then, that he had rescued the white slave? Was it once and for ever that Nature, encountering the subtle demon of Art, had closed and wrestled with the insidious thing, had seized it by the throat, and choked it, and flung it aside from the fair roadway of life? He had forgotten about those theories now. All that he was conscious of was this eager joy, with now and again a wild wonder that he should indeed have acquired so priceless a possession. Was it possible that she would really withdraw herself from the eyes of all the world and give herself to him alone?—that some day, in the beautiful and laughing future, the glory of her presence would light up the sombre halls of Castle Dare?

Of course he poured all his pent-up confidences into the ear of the astonished Major, and again and again expressed his gratitude

to his companion for having given him the opportunity of securing this transcendent happiness. The Major was somewhat frightened. He did not know in what measure he might be regarded as an accomplice by the silver-haired lady of Castle Dare. And in any case he was alarmed by the vehemence of the young man.

"My dear Macleod," said he with an oracular air, "you never have any hold on yourself. You fling the reins on the horse's neck, and gallop down-hill: a very slight check would send you whirling to the bottom. Now, you should take the advice of a man of the world, who is older than you, and who—if I may say so—has kept his eyes open. I don't want to discourage you; but you should take it for granted that accidents may happen. I would feel the reins a little bit, if I were you. Once you've got her into the church—and see her with a white veil over her head—then you may be as perfervid as you like——"

And so the simple-minded Major prattled on; Macleod paying but little heed. There had

been nothing about Major Stewart's courtship and marriage to shake the world: why, he said to himself, when the lady was pleased to lend a favouring ear, was there any reason for making such a fuss?

"Your happiness will all depend on one thing," said he to Macleod, with a complacent wisdom in the round and jovial face. "Take my word for it. I hear of people studying the character—the compatibilities and what not—of other people; but I never knew of a young man thinking of such things when he was in love. He plunges in, and finds out afterwards. Now, it all comes to this—is she likely, or not likely, to prove a sigher?"

"A what?" said Macleod, apparently awaking from a trance.

"A sigher. A woman who goes about the house all day sighing—whether over your sins or her own, she won't tell you."

"Indeed I cannot say," Macleod said, laughing. "I should hope not. I think she has excellent spirits."

"Ah!" said the Major thoughtfully; and

he himself sighed; perhaps he was thinking of a certain house far away in Mull, to which he had shortly to return.

Macleod did not know how to show his gratitude towards this good-natured friend. He would have given him half-a-dozen banquets a day; and Major Stewart liked a London dinner. But what he did offer as a great reward was this: that Major Stewart should go up the next morning to a particular church, and take up a particular position in that church, and then—then he would get a glimpse of the most wonderful creature the world had seen. Oddly enough, the Major did not eagerly accept this munificent offer. To another proposal—that he should go up to Mr. White's on the first day after their return from Sussex, and meet the young lady at luncheon—he seemed better inclined.

"But why shouldn't we go to the theatre to-night?" said he in his simple way.

Macleod looked embarrassed.

"Frankly, then, Stewart," said he, "I don't want you to make her acquaintance as an actress."

"Oh, very well," said he, not greatly disappointed. "Perhaps it is better. You see, I may be questioned at Castle Dare. Have you considered that matter?"

"Oh no!" Macleod said lightly and cheerfully; "I have had time to consider nothing as yet. I can scarcely believe it to be all real. It takes a deal of hard thinking to convince myself that I am not dreaming."

But the true fashion in which Macleod showed his gratitude to his friend was in concealing his great reluctance on going down with him into Sussex. It was like rending his heart-strings for him to leave London for a single hour at this time. What beautiful confidences, and tender timid looks, and sweet small words he was leaving behind him, in order to go and shoot a lot of miserable pheasants! He was rather gloomy when he met the Major at the Victoria Station. They got into the train; and away through the darkness of the November afternoon they rattled to Three Bridges; but all the eager sportsman had gone out of him, and he had next to nothing to say in answer to

the Major's excited questions. Occasionally he would rouse himself from his reverie, and he would talk in a perfunctory sort of fashion about the immediate business of the moment. He confessed that he had a certain theoretical repugnance to a *battue*, if it were at all like what people in the newspapers declared it to be. On the other hand, he could not well understand —judging by his experiences in the Highlands —how the shooting of driven birds could be so marvellously easy; and he was not quite sure that the writers he had referred to had had many opportunities of practising, or even observing, so very expensive an amusement. Major Stewart, for his part, freely admitted that he had no scruples whatever. Shooting birds, he roundly declared, was shooting birds, whether you shoot two or two score. And he demurely hinted that, if he had his choice, he would rather shoot the two score.

"Mind you, Stewart," Macleod said, "if we are posted anywhere near each other, mind you shoot at any bird that comes my way. I should like you to make a big bag that you may

talk about in Mull; and I don't really care about it."

And this was the man whom Miss Carry had described as being nothing but a slayer of wild animals and a preserver of beasts' skins! Perhaps in that imaginary duel between Nature and Art the enemy was not so thoroughly beaten and thrown aside after all.

So they got to Three Bridges; and there they found the carriage awaiting them; and presently they were whirling away along the dark roads, with the lamps shining now on a line of hedge and again on a long stretch of ivied brick-wall. And at last they passed a lodge-gate; and drove through a great and silent park; and finally, rattling over the gravel, drew up in front of some grey steps and a blaze of light coming from the wide-open doors. Under Lord Beauregard's guidance, they went into the drawing-room, and found a number of people idly chatting there, or reading by the subdued light of the various lamps on the small tables. There was a good deal of talk about the weather. Macleod, vaguely conscious

that these people were only strangers, and that the one heart that was thinking of him was now far away, paid but little heed; if he ha been told that the barometer predicted fifteei thunder-storms for the morrow, he would have been neither startled nor dismayed.

But he managed to say to his host, aside—

"Beauregard, look here. I suppose in this sort of shooting you have some little understanding with your head-keeper about the posts—who is to be a bit favoured, you know? Well, I wish you would ask him to look after my friend Stewart. He can leave me out altogether, if he likes."

"My dear fellow, there will be scarcely any difference; but I will look after your friend myself. I suppose you have no guns with you?"

"I have borrowed Ogilvie's. Stewart has none."

"I will get one for him."

By and by they went up stairs to their respective rooms, and Macleod was left alone —that is to say, he was scarcely aware of

the presence of the man who was opening his portmanteau and putting out his things. He lay back in the low easy-chair, and stared absently into the blazing fire. This was a beautiful but a lonely house. There were many strangers in it. But if she had been one of the people below—if he could at this moment look forward to meeting her at dinner—if there was a chance of his sitting beside her and listening to the low and sweet voice—with what an eager joy he would have waited for the sound of the bell! As it was, his heart was in London. He had no sort of interest in this big house; or in the strangers whom he had met; or in the proceedings of the morrow, about which all the men were talking. It was a lonely house.

He was aroused by a tapping at the door.

"Come in," he said—and Major Stewart entered, blooming and roseate over his display of white linen.

"Good gracious!" said he, "aren't you dressed yet? It wants but ten minutes to dinner-time. What have you been doing?"

Macleod jumped up with some shamefacedness, and began to array himself quickly.

"Macleod," said the Major, subsiding into the big arm-chair very carefully, so as not to crease his shining shirt-front, "I must give you another piece of advice. It is serious. I have heard again and again that when a man thinks only of one thing—when he keeps brooding over it day and night—he is bound to become mad. They call it monomania. You are becoming a monomaniac."

"Yes, I think I am," Macleod said, laughing; "but it is a very pleasant sort of monomania, and I am not anxious to become sane. But you really must not be hard on me, Stewart. You know this is rather an important thing that has happened to me; and it wants a good deal of thinking over."

"Bah!" the Major cried, "why take it so much *au grand sérieux?* A girl likes you; says she'll marry you; probably, if she continues in the same mind, she will. Consider yourself a lucky dog; and don't break your heart if an accident occurs. Hope for the best; that you

and she mayn't quarrel; and that she mayn't prove a sigher. Now what do you think of this house? I consider it an uncommon good dodge to put each person's name outside his bedroom-door; there can't be any confounded mistakes—and women squealing—if you come up late at night. Why, Macleod, you don't mean that this affair has destroyed all your interest in the shooting? Man, I have been down to the gun-room with your friend Beauregard; have seen the head-keeper; got a gun that suits me first-rate—a trifle long in the stock perhaps, but no matter. You won't tip any more than the head-keeper, eh? And the fellow who carries your cartridge-bag? I do think it uncommonly civil of a man, not only to ask you to go shooting, but find you in guns and cartridges as well; don't you?"

The Major chatted on with great cheerfulness. He clearly considered that he had got into excellent quarters. At dinner he told some of his most famous Indian stories to Lady Beauregard, near whom he was sitting; and at night, in the smoking-room, he was great on deer-stalking.

It was not necessary for Macleod, or anybody else, to talk. The Major was in full flow, though he stoutly refused to touch the spirits on the table. He wanted a clear head and a steady hand for the morning.

Alas! alas! The next morning presented a woful spectacle. Grey skies—heavy and rapidly drifting clouds—pouring rain—runnels of clear water by the side of every gravel-path—a rook or two battling with the squally southwester high over the wide and desolate park—the wild duck at the margin of the ruffled lake flapping their wings as if the wet was too much even for them—nearer at hand the firs and evergreens all dripping. After breakfast the male guests wandered disconsolately into the cold billiard-room, and began knocking the balls about. All the loquacious cheerfulness of the Major had fled. He looked out on the wet park and the sombre woods; and sighed.

But about twelve o'clock there was a great hurry and confusion throughout the house; for all of a sudden the skies in the west cleared; there was a glimmer of blue; and then gleams

of a pale wan light began to stream over the landscape. There was a rush to the gun-room and an eager putting-on of shooting-boots and leggings; there was a rapid tying-up of small packages of sandwiches; presently the waggonette was at the door. And then away they went over the hard gravel, and out into the wet roads; with the sunlight now beginning to light up the beautiful woods about Crawley. The horses seemed to know there was no time to lose. A new spirit took possession of the party. The Major's face glowed as red as the hip that here and there among the almost leafless hedges shone in the sunlight on the ragged brier-stem.

And yet it was about one o'clock before the work of the day began, for the beaters had to be summoned from various parts, and the small boys with the white flags—the "stops"—had to be posted so as to check runners. And then the six guns went down over a ploughed field—half clay and half chalk, and ankle deep—to the margin of a rapidly running and coffee-coloured stream, which three of them had to cross by means of a very shaky plank. Lord

Beauregard, Major Stewart, and Macleod remained on this side, keeping a look-out for a straggler, but chiefly concerned with the gradually opening and brightening sky. Then far away they heard a slight tapping on the trees; and almost at the same moment another sound caused the hearts of the two novices to jump. It was a quick *cuck-cuck*, accompanied by a rapid and silken winnowing of the air. Then an object, which seemed like a cannon-ball with a long tail attached, came whizzing along. Major Stewart fired—a bad miss. Then he wheeled round, took good aim, and down came a mass of feathers, whirling, until it fell motionless on the ground.

"Well hit!" Macleod cried; but at the same moment he became conscious that he had better mind his own business, for there was another whirring sound, and then he saw this rapidly enlarging object coming straight at him. He fired, and shot the bird dead; but so rapid was its flight that he had to duck his head as the slain bird drove past his face and tumbled on to the ground behind him.

"This is rather like firing at bomb-shells," he called out to Lord Beauregard.

It was certainly a new experience for Macleod to figure as a novice in any matter connected with shooting; but both the Major and he speedily showed that they were not unfamiliar with the use of a gun. Whether the birds came at them like bomb-shells, or sprung like a sky-rocket through the leafless branches, they met with the same polite attention; though occasionally one would double back on the beaters and get clear away, sailing far into the silver-clear sky. Lord Beauregard scarcely shot at all, unless he was fairly challenged by a bird flying right past him; he seemed quite content to see his friends having plenty of work; while, in the interest of the beaters, he kept calling out in a high monotone, "Shoot high! shoot high!" Then there was some motion among the brushwood; here and there a man or boy appeared; and finally the under-keeper with his retriever came across the stream to pick up the dead birds. That bit was done with: *vorwärts!*

"Well, Stewart," Macleod said, "what do you think of it? I don't see anything murderous or unsportsmanlike in this kind of shooting. Of course shooting with dogs is much prettier; and you don't get any exercise standing in a wet field; but the man who says that shooting these birds requires no skill at all—well, I should like to see him try."

"Macleod," said the Major gravely, as they plodded along, "you may think that I despise this kind of thing; but I don't. I give you my solemn word of honour that I don't. I will even go the length of saying that if Providence had blessed me with £50,000 a year I should be quite content to own a bit of country like this. I played the part of the wild mountaineer last night, you know; that was all very well——"

Here there was a loud call from Lord Beauregard, who was overtaking them—"*Hare! hare! Mark hare!*" The Major jumped round, put up his gun, and banged away—shooting far ahead in his eagerness. Macleod looked on; and did not even raise his gun.

"That comes of talking," the Major said gloomily. "And you—why didn't you shoot? I never saw you miss a hare in my life!"

"I was not thinking of it," Macleod said indifferently.

It was very soon apparent that he was thinking of something other than the shooting of pheasants or hares; for as they went from one wood to another during this beautiful brief November day he generally carried his gun over his shoulder—even when the whirring, bright-plumaged birds were starting from time to time from the hedge-rows—and devoted most of his attention to warning his friend when and where to shoot. However, an incident occurred which entirely changed the aspect of affairs. At one beat he was left quite alone—posted in an open space of low brushwood close by the corner of a wood. He rested the butt of his gun on his foot; he was thinking, not of any pheasant or hare, but of the beautiful picture Gertrude White would make if she were coming down one of these open glades, between the green stems of the trees, with the sunlight around her and the

fair sky overhead. Idly he watched the slowly-drifting clouds ; they were going away northward —by and by they would sail over London. The rifts of blue widened in the clear silver; surely the sunlight would now be shining over Regent's Park? Occasionally a pheasant came clattering along; he only regarded the shining colours of its head and neck brilliant in the sunlight. A hare trotted by him; he let it go. But while he was standing thus, and vaguely listening to the rattle of guns on the other side, he was suddenly startled by a quick cry of pain; and he thought he heard some one call "Macleod! Macleod!" Instantly he put his gun against a bush; and ran. He found a hedge at the end of the wood; he drove through it, and got into the open field. There was the unlucky Major, with blood running down his face, a handkerchief in his hand, and two men beside him—one of them offering him some brandy from a flask. However, after the first fright was over it was seen that Major Stewart was but slightly hurt. The youngest member of the party had fired at a bird coming out of the wood; had missed it;

had tried to wheel round to send the second barrel after it; but his feet, having sunk into the wet clay, had caught there, and in his stumbling fall, somehow or other the second barrel went off, one pellet just catching the Major under the eye. The surface wound caused a good shedding of blood, but that was all; and when the Major had got his face washed, he shouldered his gun again, and with indomitable pluck said he would see the thing out. It was nothing but a scratch, he declared. It might have been dangerous; but what was the good of considering what might have been? To the young man who had been the cause of the accident, and who was quite unable to express his profound sorrow and shame, he was generously considerate, saying that he had a mind to fine him in the sum of one penny by taking a postage-stamp to cover the wound.

"Lord Beauregard," said he, cheerfully, "I want you to show me a thorough-going hot corner. You know I am an ignoramus at this kind of thing."

"Well," said his host, "there is a good bit along here—if you would rather go on."

"Go on?" said he. "Of course!"

And it was a "hot corner." They came to it at the end of a long double hedge-row connected with the wood they had just beaten; and as there was no "stop" at the corner of the wood, the pheasants, in large numbers, had run into the channel between the double line of hedge. Here they were followed by the keepers and beaters, who kept gently driving them along. Occasionally one got up, and was instantly knocked over by one of the guns; but it was evident that the "hot corner" would be at the end of this hedge-row, where there was stationed a smock-frocked rustic who, down on his knees, was gently tapping with a bit of stick. The number of birds getting up increased, so that the six guns had pretty sharp work to reckon with them; and not a few of the wildly whirring objects got clean away into the next wood—Lord Beauregard all the time calling out from the other side of the hedge, "Shoot high! shoot high!" But at the end of the hedge-row

an extraordinary scene occurred. One after the other—then in twos and threes—the birds sprung high over the bushes; the rattle of musketry—all the guns being together now—was deafening; the air was filled with gun-powder-smoke; and every second or two another bird came tumbling down on to the young corn. Macleod, with a sort of derisive laugh, put his gun over his shoulder.

"This is downright stupidity," he said to Major Stewart, who was blazing away as hard as ever he could cram cartridges into the hot barrels of his gun. "You can't tell whether you are hitting the bird or not. There! Three men fired at that bird—and the other two were not touched."

The fusillade lasted for about eight or ten minutes; and then it was discovered that though certainly two or three hundred pheasants had got up at this corner, only twenty-two and a half brace were killed—to five guns.

"Well," said the Major, taking off his cap and wiping his forehead, "that was a bit of a scrimmage."

"Perhaps," said Macleod, who had been watching with some amusement his friend's fierce zeal; "but it was not shooting. I defy you to say how many birds you shot. Or I will do this with you—I will bet you a sovereign that, if you ask each man to tell you how many birds he has shot during the day, and add them all up, the total will be twice the number of birds the keepers will take home. But I am glad you seem to enjoy it, Stewart."

"To tell you the truth, Macleod," said the other, "I think I have had enough of it. I don't want to make a fuss; but I fancy I don't quite see clearly with this eye—it may be only some slight inflammation—but I think I will go back to the house, and see if there's any surgeon in the neighbourhood."

"There you are right; and I will go back with you," Macleod said promptly.

When their host heard of this, he was for breaking up the party; but Major Stewart warmly remonstrated; and so one of the men was sent with the two friends to show them the way back to the house. When the surgeon

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came he examined the wound and pronounced it to be slight enough in itself, but possibly dangerous when so near so sensitive an organ as the eye. He advised the Major, if any symptoms of inflammation declared themselves, to go at once to a skilful oculist in London, and not to leave for the north until he was assured.

"That sounds rather well, Macleod," said he ruefully.

"Oh, if you must remain in London—though I hope not—I will stay with you," Macleod said. It was a great sacrifice—his remaining in London, instead of going at once back to Castle Dare; but what will not one do for one's friend?

CHAPTER XI.

AN INTERVIEW.

On the eventful morning on which Major Stewart was to be presented to the chosen bride of Macleod of Dare, the simple-hearted soldier—notwithstanding that he had a shade over one eye—made himself exceedingly smart. He would show the young lady that Macleod's friends in the north were not barbarians. The Major sent back his boots to be brushed a second time. A more smoothly-fitting pair of gloves Bond Street never saw.

"But you have not the air," said he to Macleod, "of a young fellow going to see his sweetheart. What is the matter, man?"

Macleod hesitated for a moment.

"Well, I am anxious she should impress you favourably," said he frankly, "and it is an

awkward position for her—and she will be embarrassed, no doubt—and I have some pity for her, and almost wish some other way had been taken——"

"Oh, nonsense," the Major said, cheerfully, "you need not be nervous on her account. Why, man, the silliest girl in the world could impose on an old fool like me. Once upon a time, perhaps, I may have considered myself a connoisseur—well, you know, Macleod, I once was near as slim as yourself; but now, bless you, if a tolerably pretty girl only says a civil word or two to me I begin to regard her as if I were her guardian angel—*in loco parentis,* and that kind of thing—and I would sooner hang myself than scan her dress or say a word about her figure. Do you think she will be afraid of a critic with one eye? Have courage, man! I dare bet a sovereign she is quite capable of taking care of herself. It's her business."

Macleod flushed quickly; and the one eye of the Major caught that sudden confession of shame or resentment.

"What I meant was," he said instantly, "that

nature had taught the simplest of virgins a certain trick of fence—oh yes, don't you be afraid. Embarrassment! If there is any one embarrassed, it will not be me, and it will not be she. Why, she'll begin to wonder whether you are really one of the Macleods if you show yourself nervous, apprehensive, frightened like this."

"And indeed, Stewart," said he, rising as if to shake off some weight of gloomy feeling, "I scarcely know what is the matter with me. I ought to be the happiest man in the world: and sometimes this very happiness seems so great that it is like to suffocate me—I cannot breathe fast enough; and then again I get into such unreasoning fears and troubles—well, let us get out into the fresh air."

The Major carefully smoothed his hat once more, and took up his cane. He followed Macleod down stairs—like Sancho Panza waiting on Don Quixote, as he himself expressed it; and then the two friends slowly sauntered away northward, on this fairly clear and pleasant December morning.

"Your nerves are not in a healthy state, that's the fact, Macleod," said the Major, as they walked along. "The climate of London is too exciting for you; a good, long, dull winter in Mull will restore your tone. But in the meantime don't cut my throat, or your own, or anybody else's."

"Am I likely to do that?" Macleod said, laughing.

"There was young Bouverie," the Major continued, not heeding the question,—"what a handsome young fellow he was when he joined us at Gawulpoor—and he hadn't been in the place a week but he must needs go regular head over heels about our colonel's sister-in-law. An uncommon pretty woman she was too—an Irish girl, and fond of riding; and dash me if that fellow didn't fairly try to break his neck again and again just that she should admire his pluck. He was as mad as a hatter about her. Well, one day two or three of us had been riding for two or three hours on a blazing hot morning, and we came to one of the irrigation reservoirs—big wells, you know—and what does he do but

offer to bet twenty pounds he would dive into the well and swim about for five minutes, till we hoisted him out at the end of the rope. I forgot who took the bet—for none of us thought he would do it: but I believe he would have done anything so that the story of his pluck might be carried to the girl, don't you know. Well, off went his clothes, and in he jumped into the ice-cold water. Nothing would stop him. But at the end of the five minutes when we hoisted up the rope, there was no Bouverie there. It appeared that on clinging on to the rope he had twisted it somehow, and suddenly found himself about to have his neck broken, so he had to shake himself free and plunge into the water again. When at last we got him out, he had had a longer bath than he had bargained for; but there was apparently nothing the matter with him—and he had won the bet, and there would be a talk about him. However, two days afterwards, when he was at dinner, he suddenly felt as though he had got a blow on the back of his head—so he told us afterwards—and fell back insensible. That was the beginning of it.

It took him five or six years to shake off the effects of that dip——"

"And did she marry him after all?" Macleod said eagerly.

"Oh dear no. I think he had been invalided home not more than two or three months when she married Connolly, of the 71st Madras Infantry. Then she ran away from him with some civilian fellow; and Connolly blew his brains out. That," said the Major, honestly, "is always a puzzle to me. How a fellow can be such an ass as to blow his brains out when his wife runs away from him beats my comprehension altogether. Now what I should do would be this; I should thank goodness I was rid of such a piece of baggage; I would get all the good fellows I know, and give them a rattling fine dinner; and I would drink a bumper to her health, and another bumper to her never coming back."

"And I would send you our Donald, and he would play *Cha till mi tuilich* for you," Macleod said.

"But as for blowing my brains out! Well,"

the Major added, with a philosophic air, "when a man is mad he cares neither for his own life nor for anybody else's. Look at those cases you continually see in the papers: a young man is in love with a young woman; they quarrel, or she prefers some one else; what does he do but lay hold of her some evening and cut her throat—to show his great love for her—and then he coolly gives himself up to the police and says he is quite content to be hanged."

"Stewart," said Macleod, laughing, "I don't like this talk about hanging. You said a minute or two ago that I was mad."

"More or less," observed the Major, with absolute gravity,—"as the lawyer said when he mentioned the Fifteen-acre Park at Dublin."

"Well, let us get into a hansom," Macleod said. "When I am hanged you will ask them to write over my tombstone that I never kept anybody waiting for either luncheon or dinner."

The smart maid-servant who opened the door greeted Macleod with a pleasant smile; she was a sharp wench, and had discovered that

lovers have lavish hands. She showed the two visitors into the drawing-room; Macleod silent, and listening intently, the one-eyed Major observing everything, and perhaps curious to know whether the house of an actress differed from that of anybody else. He very speedily came to the conclusion that, in his small experience, he had never seen any house of its size so tastefully decorated and accurately managed as this simple home.

"But what's this!" he cried, going to the mantelpiece and taking down a drawing that was somewhat ostentatiously placed there. "Well! if this is English hospitality! By Jove! an insult to me, and my father, and my father's clan—that blood alone will wipe out! *The astonishment of Sandy MacAlister Mhor on beholding a glimpse of sunlight:* look!"

He showed this rude drawing to Macleod—a sketch of a wild Highlander, with his hair on end, his eyes starting out of his head, and his hands uplifted in bewilderment. This work of art was the production of Miss Carry,

who, on hearing the knock at the door, had whipped into the room, placed her bit of savage satire over the mantelpiece, and whipped out again. But her deadly malice so far failed of its purpose that, instead of inflicting any annoyance, it most effectually broke the embarrassment of Miss Gertrude's entrance and introduction to the Major.

"Carry has no great love for the Highlands," she said, laughing and slightly blushing at the same time, "but she need not have prepared so cruel a welcome for you. Won't you sit down, Major Stewart? Papa will be here directly."

"I think it is uncommonly clever," the Major said, fixing his one eye on the paper as if he would give Miss White distinctly to understand that he had not come to stare at her. "Perhaps she will like us better when she knows more about us."

"Do you think," said Miss White demurely, "that it is possible for any one born in the south to learn to like the bagpipes?"

"No," said Macleod quickly, and it was

not usual for him to break in in this eager way about a usual matter of talk, "that is all a question of association. If you had been brought up to associate the sound of the pipes with every memorable thing—with the sadness of a funeral, and the welcome of friends come to see you, and the pride of going away to war, then you would understand why the *Cogadh na Sith*, or the *Failte Phrionsa*, or that one that is called *I had a Kiss of the King's Hand*—why these bring the tears to a Highlander's eyes. The pibrochs preserve our legends for us," he went on to say, in rather an excited fashion—for he was obviously nervous, and perhaps a trifle paler than usual. "They remind us of what our families have done in all parts of the world; and there is not one you do not associate with some friend or relative who is gone away; or with some great merrymaking; or with the death of one who was dear to you. You never saw that—the boat taking the coffin across the loch, and the friends of the dead sitting with bent heads, and the piper at

the bow playing the slow Lament to the time of the oars—if you had seen that you would know what the *Cumhadh Mhic an Toiseach* is to a Highlander. And if you have a friend come to see you, what is it first tells you of his coming? When you can hear nothing for the waves, you can hear the pipes! And if you were going into a battle, what would put madness into your head but to hear the march that you know your brothers and uncles and cousins last heard when they marched on with a cheer to take death as it happened to come to them? You might as well wonder at the Highlanders loving the heather. That is not a very handsome flower."

Miss White was sitting quite calm and collected. A covert glance or two had convinced the Major that she was entirely mistress of the situation. If there was any one nervous, embarrassed, excited throughout this interview, it was not Miss Gertrude White.

"The other morning," she said complacently—and she pulled down her dainty white

cuffs another sixteenth of an inch—"I was going along Buckingham Palace Road, and I met a detachment—is a detachment right, Major Stewart?—of a Highland regiment. At least I supposed it was part of a Highland regiment, because they had eight pipers playing at their head; and I noticed that the cab-horses were far more frightened than they would have been at twice the noise coming from an ordinary band. I was wondering whether they might think it the roar of some strange animal—you know how a camel frightens a horse. But I envied the officer who was riding in front of the soldiers. He was a very handsome man; and I thought how proud he must feel to be at the head of those fine, stalwart fellows. In fact, I felt for a moment that I should like to have command of a regiment myself."

"Faith," said the Major gallantly, "I would exchange into that regiment if I had to serve as a drummer-boy."

Embarrassed by this broad compliment? Not a bit of it. She laughed lightly; and

then rose to introduce the two visitors to her father, who had just entered the room.

It was not to be expected that Mr. White, knowing the errand of his guests, should give them an inordinately effusive welcome. But he was gravely polite. He prided himself on being a man of common sense; and he knew it was no use fighting against the inevitable. If his daughter would leave the stage, she would; and there was some small compensation in the fact that by her doing so she would become Lady Macleod. He would have less money to spend on trinkets two hundred years old; but he would gain something—a very little, no doubt—from the reflected lustre of her social position.

"We were talking about officers, papa," she said brightly, "and I was about to confess that I have always had a great liking for soldiers. I know if I had been a man I should have been a soldier. But do you know, Sir Keith, you were once very rude to me about your friend Lieutenant Ogilvie?"

Macleod started.

"I hope not," said he, gravely.

"Oh yes, you were. Don't you remember the Caledonian Ball? I only remarked that Lieutenant Ogilvie, who seemed to me a bonnie boy, did not look as if he were a very formidable warrior; and you answered with some dark saying—what was it?—that nobody could tell what sword was in a scabbard until it was drawn?"

"Oh," said he, laughing somewhat nervously, "you forget: I was talking to the Duchess of Devonshire."

"And I am sure her Grace was much obliged to you for frightening her so," Miss White said with a dainty smile.

Major Stewart was greatly pleased by the appearance and charming manner of this young lady. If Macleod, who was confessedly a handsome young fellow, had searched all over England, he could not have chosen a fitter mate. But he was also distinctly of opinion—judging by his one eye only—that nobody needed to be alarmed about this young lady's exceeding sensitiveness and embarrassment before strangers.

He thought she would on all occasions be fairly capable of holding her own. And he was quite convinced too that the beautiful, clear eyes, under the long lashes, pretty accurately divined what was going forward. But what did this impression of the honest soldier's amount to? Only, in other words, that Miss Gertrude White, though a pretty woman, was not a fool.

Luncheon was announced, and they went into the other room, accompanied by Miss Carry, who had suffered herself to be introduced to Major Stewart with a certain proud sedateness. And now the Major played the part of the accepted lover's friend to perfection. He sate next Miss White herself; and no matter what the talk was about, he managed to bring it round to something that redounded to Macleod's advantage. Macleod could do this, and Macleod could do that; it was all Macleod, and Macleod, and Macleod.

"And if you should ever come to our part of the world, Miss White," said the Major—not letting his glance meet hers—"you will be able to understand something of the old loyalty and

affection and devotion the people in the Highlands show to their chiefs; for I don't believe there is a man, woman, or child about the place who would not rather have a hand cut off than that Macleod should have a thorn scratch him. And it is all the more singular, you know, that they are not Macleods. Mull is the country of the Macleans; and the Macleans and the Macleods had their fights in former times. There is a cave they will show you round the point from *Ru na Gaul* lighthouse that is called *Uamh-na-Ceann*—that is, the Cavern of the Skulls—where the Macleods murdered fifty of the Macleans, though Alastair Crotach, the humpbacked son of Macleod, was himself killed."

"I beg your pardon, Major Stewart," said Miss Carry, with a grand stateliness in her tone, "but will you allow me to ask if this is true? It is a passage I saw quoted in a book the other day, and I copied it out. It says something about the character of the people you are talking about."

She handed him the bit of paper; and he read

these words:—"*Trew it is, that thir Ilandish men ar of nature verie prowd, suspicious, avaricious, full of decept and evill inventioun each aganis his nychtbour, be what way soever he may circumvin him. Besydis all this, they ar sa crewall in taking of revenge that nather have they regard to person, eage, tyme, or caus; sa ar they generallie all sa far addictit to thair awin tyrannicall opiniôns that, in all respects, they exceed in creweltie the maist barbarous people that ever hes bene sen the begynning of the warld.*"

"Upon my word," said the honest Major "it is a most formidable indictment. You had better ask Sir Keith about it."

He handed the paper across the table; Macleod read it, and burst out laughing.

"It is too true, Carry," said he. "We are a dreadful lot of people up there among the hills. Nothing but murder and rapine from morning till night."

"I was telling him this morning he would probably be hanged," observed the Major, gravely.

"For what?" Miss White asked.

"Oh," said the Major carelessly, "I did not specify the offence. Cattle-lifting, probably."

Miss Carry's fierce onslaught was thus laughed away, and they proceeded to other matters; the Major meanwhile not failing to remark that this luncheon differed considerably from the bread and cheese and glass of whisky of a shooting-day in Mull. Then they returned to the drawing-room, and had tea there, and some further talk. The Major had by this time quite abandoned his critical and observant attitude. He had succumbed to the enchantress. He was ready to declare that Gertrude White was the most fascinating woman he had ever met, while, as a matter of fact, she had been rather timidly making suggestions and asking his opinion all the time. And when they rose to leave she said—

"I am very sorry, Major Stewart, that this unfortunate accident should have altered your plans; but since you must remain in London, I hope we shall see you often before you go."

"You are very kind," said he.

"We cannot ask you to dine with us," she said, quite simply and frankly, "because of my engagements in the evening; but we are always at home at lunch-time, and Sir Keith knows the way."

"Thank you very much," said the Major, as he warmly pressed her hand.

The two friends passed out into the street.

"My dear fellow," said the Major, "you have been lucky—don't imagine I am humbugging you—a really handsome lass, and a thorough woman of the world too—trained and fitted at every point—none of your farm-yard beauties. But I say, Macleod, I say," he continued solemnly, "won't she find it a trifle dull at Castle Dare?—the change, you know."

"It is not necessary that she should live at Dare," Macleod said.

"Oh, of course, you know your own plans best."

"I have none. All that is in the air as yet. And so you do not think I have made a mistake?"

"I wish I was five-and-twenty, and could

make a mistake like that," said the Major, with a sigh.

Meanwhile Miss Carry had confronted her sister.

"So you have been inspected, Gerty. Do you think you passed muster?"

"Go away, and don't be impertinent, you silly girl," said the other, good-naturedly.

Carry pulled a folded piece of paper from her pocket, and, advancing, placed it on the table.

"There," said she, "put that in your purse, and don't tell me you have not been warned, Gertrude White."

The elder sister did as she was bid; but indeed she was not thinking at that moment of the cruel and revengeful character of the Western Highlanders, which Miss Carry's quotation set forth in such plain terms. She was thinking that she had never before seen Glenogie look so soldier-like and handsome.

CHAPTER XII.

AT A RAILWAY STATION.

The few days of grace obtained by the accident that happened to Major Stewart fled too quickly away; and the time came for saying farewell. With a dismal apprehension Macleod looked forward to this moment. He had seen her on the stage bid a pathetic good-bye to her lover; and there it was beautiful enough—with her shy coquetries, and her winning ways, and the timid, reluctant confession of her love. But there was nothing at all beautiful about this ordeal through which he must pass. It was harsh and horrible. He trembled even as he thought of it.

The last day of his stay in London arrived; he rose with a sense of some awful doom hanging over him that he could in no wise shake off.

It was a strange day too—the world of London vaguely shining through a pale fog, the sun a globe of red fire. There was hoar-frost on the window-ledges; at last the winter seemed about to begin.

And then, as ill-luck would have it, Miss White had some important business at the theatre to attend to, so that she could not see him till the afternoon; and he had to pass the empty morning somehow.

"You look like a man going to be hanged," said the Major, about noon; "come, shall we stroll down to the river now? We can have a chat with your friend before lunch, and a look over his boat."

Colonel Ross, being by chance at Erith, had heard of Macleod's being in town, and had immediately come up in his little steam yacht, the *Iris*, which now lay at anchor close to Westminster Bridge, on the Lambeth side. He had proposed, merely for the oddity of the thing, that Macleod and his friend the Major should lunch on board, and young Ogilvie had promised to run up from Aldershot.

"Macleod," said the gallant soldier, as the two friends walked leisurely down towards the Thames, "if you let this monomania get such a hold of you, do you know how it will end? You will begin to show signs of having a conscience."

"What do you mean?" said he, absently.

"Your nervous system will break down, and you will begin to have a conscience. That is a sure sign, in either a man or a nation. Man, don't I see it all around us now in this way of looking at India and the colonies? We had no conscience—we were in robust health as a nation—when we thrashed the French out of Canada; and seized India; and stole land just wherever we could put our fingers on it all over the globe; but now it is quite different—we are only educating these countries up to self-government—it is all in the interest of morality that we protect them—as soon as they wish to go we will give them our blessing—in short, we have got a conscience, because the national health is feeble and nervous. You look out, or you will get into the same condition. You will begin to

ask whether it is right to shoot pretty little birds in order to eat them; you will become a vegetarian; and you will take to goloshes."

"Good gracious!" said Macleod, waking up, "what is all this about?"

"Rob Roy," observed the Major, oracularly, "was a healthy man. I will make you a bet he was not much troubled by chilblains."

"Stewart," Macleod cried, "do you want to drive me mad? What on earth are you talking about?"

"Anything," the Major confessed frankly, "to rouse you out of your monomania, because I don't want to have my throat cut by a lunatic some night up at Castle Dare."

"Castle Dare," repeated Macleod, gloomily. "I think I shall scarcely know the place again; and we have been away about a fortnight!"

No sooner had they got down to the landing-steps on the Lambeth side of the river than they were descried from the deck of the beautiful little steamer, and a boat was sent ashore for them. Colonel Ross was standing by the tiny gangway to receive them; they got on board,

and passed into the glass-surrounded saloon. There certainly was something odd in the notion of being anchored in the middle of the great city; absolutely cut off from it and inclosed in a miniature floating world; the very sound of it hushed and remote. And, indeed, on this strange morning the big town looked more dream-like than usual as they regarded it from the windows of this saloon:—the buildings opal-like in the pale fog; a dusky glitter on the high towers of the Houses of Parliament; and some touches of rose-red on the ripples of the yellow water around them.

Right over there was the very spot to which he had idly wandered in the clear dawn, to have a look at the peacefully flowing stream. How long ago? It seemed to him, looking back, somehow the morning of life—shining clear and beautiful, before any sombre anxieties, and joys scarcely less painful, had come to cloud the fair sky. He thought of himself at that time with a sort of wonder. He saw himself standing there, glad to watch the pale and growing glory of the dawn, careless as to what the day might

bring forth; and he knew that it was another and an irrecoverable Macleod he was mentally regarding.

Well, when his friend Ogilvie arrived, he endeavoured to assume some greater spirit and cheerfulness, and they had a pleasant enough luncheon-party in the gently-moving saloon. Thereafter Colonel Ross was for getting up steam and taking them for a run somewhere: but at this point Macleod begged to be excused for running away; and so having consigned Major Stewart to the care of his host for the moment, and having bade good-bye to Ogilvie, he went ashore. He made his way up to the cottage in South Bank. He entered the drawing-room and sate down, alone.

When she came in, she said, with a quick anxiety—

"You are not ill?"

"No, no," he said, rising—and his face was haggard somewhat, "but it is not pleasant to come to say good-bye——"

"You must not take it so seriously as that," she said, with a friendly smile.

"My going away is like going into a grave," he said slowly; "it is dark."

And then he took her two hands in his, and regarded her with such an intensity of look that she almost drew back, afraid.

"Sometimes," he said, watching her eyes, "I think I shall never see you again."

"Oh, Keith," said she, drawing her hands away and speaking half playfully, "you really frighten me. And even if you were never to see me again, wouldn't it be a very good thing for you? You would have got rid of a bad bargain."

"It would not be a very good thing for me," he said, still regarding her.

"Oh, well, don't speak of it," said she, lightly; "let us speak of all that is to be done in the long time that must pass before we meet——"

"But why '*must*'?" he said eagerly. "Why '*must*'? If you knew how I look forward to the blackness of this winter away up there—so far away from you that I shall forget the sound of your voice—oh! you cannot know what it is to me!"

He had sat down again; his eyes, with a sort of pained and hunted look in them, bent on the floor.

"But there is a '*must*,' you know," she said cheerfully, "and we should be sensible folk and recognise it. You know I ought to have a probationary period, as it were—like a nun, you know, just to see if she is fit to——"

Here Miss White paused, with a little embarrassment; but presently she charged the difficulty, and said with a slight laugh—

"To take the veil, in fact. You must give me time to become accustomed to a whole heap of things: if we were to do anything suddenly now, we might blunder into some great mistake, perhaps irretrievable. I must train myself by degrees for another kind of life altogether; and I am going to surprise you, Keith—I am indeed. If papa takes me to the Highlands next year, you won't recognise me at all. I am going to read up all about the Highlands, and learn the tartans, and the names of fishes and birds; and I will walk in the rain and try to think nothing about it; and perhaps

I may learn a little Gaelic: indeed, Keith, when you see me in the Highlands, you will find me a thorough Highlandwoman."

"You will never become a Highlandwoman," he said, with a grave kindness. "Is it needful? I would rather see you as you are than playing a part."

Her eyes expressed some quick wonder, for he had almost quoted her father's words to her.

"You would rather see me as I am?" she said demurely. "But what am I? I don't know myself."

"You are a beautiful and gentle-hearted Englishwoman," he said, with honest admiration—"a daughter of the south. Why should you wish to be anything else? When you come to us, I will show you a true Highlandwoman—that is, my cousin Janet."

"Now you have spoiled all my ambition," she said somewhat petulantly. "I had intended spending all the winter in training myself to forget the habits and feelings of an actress; and I was going to educate myself for another kind of life; and now I find that when I go to the

Highlands you will compare me with your cousin Janet!"

"That is impossible," said he absently, for he was thinking of the time when the summer seas would be blue again, and the winds soft, and the sky clear; and then he saw the long gig of the *Umpire* going merrily out to the great steamer to bring the beautiful stranger from the south to Castle Dare!

"Ah, well, I am not going to quarrel with you on this our last day together," she said, and she gently placed her soft white hand on the clenched fist that rested on the table. "I see you are in great trouble—I wish I could lessen it. And yet how could I wish that you should think of me less, even during the long winter evenings, when it will be so much more lonely for you than for me? But you must leave me my hobby all the same; and you must think of me always as preparing myself and looking forward; for at least, you know you will expect me to be able to sing a Highland ballad to your friends!"

"Yes, yes," he said hastily, "if it is all true—

if it is all possible—what you speak of. Sometimes I think it is madness of me to fling away my only chance; to have everything I care for in the world near me, and to go away and perhaps never return; sometimes I know in my heart that I shall never see you again—never after this day."

"Ah, now," said she brightly—for she feared this black demon getting possession of him again, "I will kill that superstition at once. You *shall* see me after to-day; for, as sure as my name is Gertrude White, I will go up to the railway-station to-morrow morning, and see you off. There!"

"You will?" he said, with a flush of joy on his face.

"But I don't want any one else to see me," she said, looking down.

"Oh, I will manage that," he said eagerly. "I will get Major Stewart into the carriage ten minutes before the train starts."

"Colonel Ross?"

"He goes back to Erith to night."

"And I will bring to the station," said she,

with some shy colour in her face, "a little present—if you should speak of me to your mother you might give her this from me—it belonged to my mother."

Could anything have been more delicately devised than this tender and timid message?

"You have a woman's heart," he said.

And then in the same low voice she began to explain that she would like him to go to the theatre that evening; and that perhaps he would go alone; and would he do her the favour to be in a particular box? She took a piece of paper from her purse, and shyly handed it to him. How could he refuse?—though he flushed slightly. It was a favour she asked. "I will know where you are," she said.

And so he was not to bid good-bye to her on this occasion, after all. But he bade good-bye to Mr. White, and to Miss Carry, who was quite civil to him now that he was going away; and then he went out into the cold and grey December afternoon. They were lighting the lamps. But gaslight throws no cheerfulness on a grave.

He went to the theatre later on; and the talisman she had given him took him into a box almost level with the stage, and so near to it that the glare of the footlights bewildered his eyes until he retired into the corner. And once more he saw the puppets come and go; with the one live woman among them, whose every tone of voice made his heart leap. And then this drawing-room scene, in which she comes in alone, and talking to herself? She sits down to the piano, carelessly. Some one enters, unperceived, and stands silent there, to listen to the singing. And this air that she sings, waywardly, like a light-hearted school-girl?—

"Hi-ri-libhin o, Brave MacIntyre,
Hi-ri-libhin o, Costly thy wooing!
Thou'st slain the maid.
Hug-o-rin-o, 'Tis thy undoing.

"Hi-ri-libhin o, Friends of my love,
Hi-ri-libhin o, Do not upbraid him;
He was leal.
Hug-o-rin-o, Chance betrayed him."

Macleod's breathing came quick and hard. She had not sung this ballad of the brave MacIntyre

when formerly he had seen the piece. Did she merely wish him to know—by this arch rendering of the gloomy song—that she was pursuing her Highland studies? And then the last verse she sang in the Gaelic! He was so near that he could hear this adjuration to the unhappy lover to seek his boat and fly, steering wide of Jura and avoiding Mull:—

"Hi-ri-libhin o, Buin Bàta,
Hi-ri-libhin o, Fàg an dùthaich,
Seachain Mule,
Hug-o-rin-o: Sna taodh Jura!"

Was she laughing, then, at her pronunciation of the Gaelic when she carelessly rose from the piano—and, in doing so, directed one glance towards him which made him quail? The foolish piece went on. She was more bright, vivacious, coquettish than ever: how could she have such spirits in view of the long separation that lay on his heart like lead? Then, at the end of the piece, there was a tapping at the door, and an envelope was handed in to him. It only contained a card, with the message

"Good night!" scrawled in pencil. It was the last time he ever was in any theatre.

Then that next morning,—cold, and raw, and damp, with a blustering north-west wind that seemed to bring an angry summons from the far seas. At the station, his hand was trembling like the hand of a drunken man; his eyes wild and troubled; his face haggard. And as the moment arrived for the train to start, he became more and more excited.

"Come and take your place, Macleod," the Major said. "There is no use worrying about leaving. We have eaten our cake. The frolic is at an end. All we can do is to sing, 'Then fare you well, my Mary Blane,' and put up with whatever is ahead. If I could only have a drop of real, genuine Talisker to steady my nerves——"

But here the Major, who had been incidentally leaning out of the window, caught sight of a figure; and instantly he withdrew his head. Macleod disappeared.

That great, gaunt room—with the hollow footfalls of strangers, and the cries outside.

His face was quite white when he took her hand.

"I am very late," she said, with a smile.

He could not speak at all. He fixed his eyes on hers with a strange intensity, as if he would read her very soul; and what could one find there but a great gentleness and sincerity, and the frank confidence of one who had nothing to conceal?

"Gertrude," said he at last, "whatever happens to us two, you will never forget that I loved you."

"I think I may be sure of that," she said, looking down.

They rang a bell outside.

"Good-bye, then."

He tightly grasped the hand he held; once more he gazed into those clear and confiding eyes—with an almost piteously-anxious look: then he kissed her, and hurried away. But she was bold enough to follow. Her eyes were moist. Her heart was beating fast. If Glenogie had there and then challenged her, and said, "*Come, then, sweetheart; will you fly with*

me? And the proud mother will meet you. And the gentle cousin will attend on you. And Castle Dare will welcome the young bride!"—what would she have said? The moment was over. She only saw the train go gently away from the station; and she saw the piteous eyes fixed on hers; and while he was in sight she waved her handkerchief. When the train had disappeared, she turned away with a sigh.

"Poor fellow," she was thinking, "he is very much in earnest—far more in earnest than even poor Howson. It would break my heart if I were to bring him any trouble."

By the time she had got to the end of the platform, her thoughts had taken a more cheerful turn.

"Dear me," she was saying to herself, "I quite forgot to ask him whether my Gaelic was good."

When she had got into the street outside, the day was brightening.

"I wonder," she was asking herself, "whether Carry would come and look at that exhibition of water-colours; and how long should we be in getting there?"

CHAPTER XIII.

A DISCLOSURE.

AND now he was all eagerness to brave the first dragon in his way—the certain opposition of this proud old lady at Castle Dare. No doubt she would stand aghast at the mere mention of such a thing; perhaps in her sudden indignation she might utter sharp words that would rankle afterwards in the memory. In any case he knew the struggle would be long, and bitter, and harassing; and he had not the skill of speech to persuasively bend a woman's will. There was another way—impossible, alas! —he had thought of. If only he could have taken Gertrude White by the hand—if only he could have led her up the hall, and presented her to his mother, and said, "Mother, this is your daughter: is she not fit to be the daughter

of so proud a mother?"—the fight would have been over. How could any one withstand the appeal of those fearless and tender clear eyes?

Impatiently he waited for the end of dinner on the evening of his arrival; impatiently he heard Donald, the piper lad, play the brave Salute—the wild shrill yell overcoming the low thunder of the Atlantic outside; and he paid but little attention to the old and familiar *Cumhadh na Cloinne*. Then Hamish put the whisky and the claret on the table; and withdrew. They were left alone.

"And now, Keith," said his cousin Janet, with the wise grey eyes grown cheerful and kind, "you will tell us about all the people you saw in London; and was there much gaiety going on; and did you see the Queen at all; and did you give any fine dinners?"

"How can I answer you all at once, Janet?" said he, laughing in a somewhat nervous way. "I did not see the Queen, for she was at Windsor; and I did not give any fine dinners, for it is not the time of year in London to give fine dinners; and indeed I spent enough money

in that way when I was in London before. But I saw several of the friends who were very kind to me when I was in London in the summer. And do you remember, Janet, my speaking to you about the beautiful young lady—the actress—I met at the house of Colonel Ross of Duntorme?"

"Oh, yes, I remember very well."

"Because," said he—and his fingers were rather nervous as he took out a package from his breast-pocket—"I have got some photographs of her for the mother and you to see. But it is little of any one that you can understand from photographs. You would have to hear her talk, and see her manner, before you could understand why every one speaks so well of her, and why she is a friend with every one——"

He had handed the packet to his mother, and the old lady had adjusted her eye-glasses, and was turning over the various photographs.

"She is very good-looking," said Lady Macleod. "Yes, she is very good-looking. And that is her sister?"

"Yes."

Janet was looking over them too.

"But where did you get the photographs of her, Keith?" she said. "They are from all sorts of places—Scarborough, Newcastle, Brighton——"

"I got them from herself," said he.

"Oh, do you know her so well?"

"I know her very well. She was an intimate friend of the people whose acquaintance I first made in London," he said, simply; and then he turned to his mother: "I wish photographs could speak, mother, for then you might make her acquaintance, and as she is coming to the Highlands next year——"

"We have no theatre in Mull, Keith," Lady Macleod said, with a smile.

"But by that time she will not be an actress at all: did I not tell you that before?" he said, eagerly. "Did I not tell you that? She is going to leave the stage—perhaps sooner or later, but certainly by that time; and when she comes to the Highlands next year with her father, she will be travelling just like any one

else. And I hope, mother, you won't let them think that we Highlanders are less hospitable than the people of London."

He made the suggestion in an apparently careless fashion; but there was an anxious look in his eyes. Janet noticed that.

"It would be strange if they were to come to so unfrequented a place as the west of Mull," said Lady Macleod, somewhat coldly, as she put the photographs aside.

"But I have told them all about the place, and what they will see; and they are eagerly looking forward to it; and you surely would not have them put up at the inn at Bunessan, mother?"

"Really, Keith, I think you have been imprudent. It was little matter our receiving a bachelor friend like Norman Ogilvie; but I don't think we are quite in a condition to entertain strangers at Dare."

"No one objected to me as a stranger when I went to London," said he, proudly.

"If they are anywhere in the neighbourhood," said Lady Macleod, "I should be pleased to

show them all the attention in my power, as you say they were friendly with you in London; but really, Keith, I don't think you can ask me to invite two strangers to Dare——"

"Then it is to the inn at Bunessan they must go?" he asked.

"Now, auntie," said Janet Macleod, with her gentle voice, "you are not going to put poor Keith into a fix; I know you won't do that. I see the whole thing; it is all because Keith was so thorough a Highlander. They were talking about Scotland; and no doubt he said there was nothing in the country to be compared with our islands, and caves, and cliffs. And then they spoke of coming; and of course he threw open the doors of the house to them. He would not have been a Highlander if he had done anything else, auntie; and I know you won't be the one to make him break off an invitation. And if we cannot give them grand entertainments at Dare, we can give them a Highland welcome anyway."

This appeal to the Highland pride of the mother was not to be withstood.

"Very well, Keith," said she. "We shall do what we can for your friends; though it isn't much in this old place."

"She will not look at it that way," he said, eagerly. "I know that. She will be proud to meet you, mother; and to shake hands with you; and to go about with you, and do just whatever you are doing——"

Lady Macleod started.

"How long do you propose this visit should last?" she said.

"Oh, I don't know," said he, hastily. "But you know, mother, you would not hurry your guests; for I am sure you would be as proud as any one to show them that we have things worth seeing. We should take her to the cathedral at Iona on some moonlight night; and then some day we could go out to the Dubh Artach lighthouse—and you know how the men are delighted to see a new face——"

"You would never think of that, Keith," his cousin said. "Do you think a London young lady would have the courage to be swung on to the rocks and to climb up all those steps outside?"

"She has the courage for that, or for anything," said he. "And, then, you know she would be greatly interested in the clouds of puffins and the skarts behind Staffa; and we would take her to the great caves in the cliffs at Gribun; and I have no doubt she would like to go out to one of the uninhabited islands."

Lady Macleod had preserved a stern silence. When she had so far yielded as to promise to ask those two strangers to come to Castle Dare on their round of the western islands, she had taken it for granted that their visit would necessarily be of the briefest; but the projects of which Keith Macleod now spoke seemed to suggest something like a summer passed at Dare. And he went on talking in this strain, nervously delighted with the pictures that each promised excursion called up. Miss White would be charmed with this, and delighted with that. Janet would find her so pleasant a companion; the mother would be inclined to pet her at first sight.

"She is already anxious to make your acquaintance, mother," said he to the proud

old dame who sat there ominously silent. "And she could think of no other message to send you than this—it belonged to her mother."

He opened the little package—of old lace, or something of that kind—and handed it to his mother; and at the same time, his impetuosity carrying him on, he said that perhaps the mother would write now and propose the visit in the summer.

At this Lady Macleod's surprise overcame her reserve.

"You must be mad, Keith! To write in the middle of winter and send an invitation for the summer! And really the whole thing is so extraordinary—a present coming to me from an absolute stranger—and that stranger an actress who is quite unknown to any one I know——"

"Mother, mother," he cried, "don't say any more. She has promised to be my wife."

Lady Macleod stared at him—as if to see whether he had really gone mad; and rose, and pushed back her chair.

"Keith," she said, slowly, and with a cold dignity, "when you choose a wife, I hope I will be the first to welcome her: and I shall be proud to see you with a wife worthy of the name that you bear; but in the meantime I do not think that such a subject should be made the occasion of a foolish jest."

And with that she left the apartment; and Keith Macleod turned in a bewildered sort of fashion to his cousin. Janet Macleod had risen too; she was regarding him with anxious and troubled and tender eyes.

"Janet," said he, "it is no jest at all!"

"I know that," said she, in a low voice, and her face was somewhat pale. "I have known that. I knew it before you went away to England this last time."

And suddenly she went over to him, and bravely held out her hand; and there were quick tears in the beautiful grey eyes.

"Keith," said she, "there is no one will be more proud to see you happy than I; and I will do what I can for you now, if you will let me; for I see your whole heart is set on it;

and how can I doubt that you have chosen a good wife?"

"Oh, Janet, if you could only see her and know her!"

She turned aside for a moment—only for a moment. When he next saw her face she was quite gay.

"You must know, Keith," said she, with a smile shining through the tears of the friendly eyes, "that women-folk are very jealous; and all of a sudden you come to auntie and me, and tell us that a stranger has taken away your heart from us and from Dare; and you must expect us to be angry and resentful just a little bit at first."

"I never could expect that from you, Janet," said he. "I knew that was always impossible from you."

"As for auntie, then," she said, warmly, "is it not natural that she should be surprised and perhaps offended——?"

"But she says she does not believe it—that I am making a joke of it——"

"That is only her way of protesting, you

know," said the wise cousin. "And you must expect her to be angry and obdurate; because women have their prejudices, you know, Keith and this young lady—well, it is a pity she is not known to some one auntie knows."

"She is known to Norman Ogilvie, and to dozens of Norman Ogilvie's friends, and Major Stewart has seen her," said he quickly; and then he drew back. "But that is nothing. I do not choose to have any one to vouch for her."

"I know that; I understand that, Keith," Janet Macleod said, gently. "It is enough for me that you have chosen her to be your wife; I know you would choose a good woman to be your wife; and it will be enough for your mother when she comes to reflect. But you must be patient."

"Patient I would be, if it concerned myself alone," said he, "but the reflection—the insult of the doubt——"

"Now, now, Keith," said she, "don't let the hot blood of the Macleods get the better of you. You must be patient, and considerate. If you will sit down now quietly, and tell me

all about the young lady, I will be your ambassador, if you like: and I think I will be able to persuade auntie."

"I wonder if there ever was any woman as kind as you are, Janet?" said he, looking at her with a sort of wondering admiration.

"You must not say that any more now," she said, with a smile. "You must consider the young lady you have chosen as perfection in all things. And this is a small matter. If auntie is difficult to persuade, and should protest, and so forth, what she says will not hurt me, whereas it might hurt you very sorely. And now you will tell me all about the young lady; for I must have my hands full of arguments when I go to your mother."

And so this Court of Inquiry was formed; with one witness not altogether unprejudiced in giving his evidence; and with a judge ready to become the accomplice of the witness at any point. Somehow Macleod avoided speaking of Gertrude White's appearance. Janet was rather a plain woman—despite those tender Celtic eyes. He spoke rather of her filial duty and her

sisterly affection; he minutely described her qualities as a house-mistress; and he was enthusiastic about the heroism she had shown in determining to throw aside the glittering triumphs of her calling to live a simpler and wholesomer life. That passage in the career of Miss Gertrude White somewhat puzzled Janet Macleod. If it were the case that the ambitions and jealousies and simulated emotions of a life devoted to art had a demoralising and degrading effect on the character, why had not the young lady made the discovery a little earlier? What was the reason of her very sudden conversion? It was no doubt very noble on her part, if she really were convinced that this continual stirring up of sentiment without leading to practical issues had an unwholesome influence on her woman's nature, to voluntarily surrender all the intoxication of success, with its praises and flatteries. But why was the change in her opinions so sudden? According to Macleod's own account, Miss Gertrude White, when he first went up to London, was wholly given over to the ambition of succeeding in her profession.

She was then the "white slave." She made no protest against the repeatedly-announced theories of her father to the effect that an artist ceased to live for himself or herself, and became merely a medium for the expression of the emotions of others. Perhaps the gentle cousin Janet would have had a clearer view of the whole case if she had known that Miss Gertrude White's awakening doubts as to the wholesomeness of simulated emotions on the human soul were strictly coincident in point of time with her conviction that at any moment she pleased she might call herself Lady Macleod.

With all the art he knew he described the beautiful small courtesies and tender ways of the little household at Rose Bank; and he made it appear that this young lady, brought up amid the sweet observances of the south, was making an enormous sacrifice in offering to brave, for his sake, the transference to the harder and harsher ways of the north.

"And, you know, Keith, she speaks a good deal for herself," Janet Macleod said, turning over the photographs, and looking at them

perhaps a little wistfully. "It is a pretty face. It must make many friends for her. If she were here herself now, I don't think auntie would hold out for a moment."

"That is what I know," said he, eagerly. "That is why I am anxious she should come here. And if it were only possible to bring her now, there would be no more trouble; and I think we could get her to leave the stage—at least I would try. But how could we ask her to Dare in the winter-time? The sea and the rain would frighten her, and she would never consent to live here. And perhaps she needs time to quite make up her mind; she said she would educate herself all the winter through, and that, when I saw her again, she would be a thorough Highland-woman. That shows you how willing she is to make any sacrifice, if she thinks it right."

"But if she is so convinced," said Janet, doubtfully, "that she ought to leave the stage, why does she not do so at once? You say her father has enough money to support the family?"

"Oh yes, he has," said Macleod; and then he added, with some hesitation, "Well, Janet, I did not like to press that. She has already granted so much. But I might ask her."

At this moment Lady Macleod's maid came into the hall and said that her mistress wished to see Miss Macleod.

"Perhaps auntie thinks I am conspiring with you, Keith," she said, laughing, when the girl had gone. "Well, you will leave the whole thing in my hands; and I will do what I can. And be patient and reasonable, Keith, even if your mother won't hear of it for a day or two. We women are very prejudiced against each other, you know; and we have quick tempers, and we want a little coaxing and persuasion—that is all."

"You have always been a good friend to me, Janet," he said.

"And I hope it will all turn out for your happiness, Keith," she said, gently, as she left.

But as for Lady Macleod, when Janet reached her room, the haughty old dame was "neither to hold nor to bind." There was nothing she would

not have done for this favourite son of hers but this one thing. Give her consent to such a marriage? The ghosts of all the Macleods of Dare would call shame on her!

"Oh, auntie," said the patient Janet, "he has been a good son to you. And you must have known he would marry some day."

"Marry!" said the old lady, and she turned a quick eye on Janet herself. "I was anxious to see him married. And when he was choosing a wife I think he might have looked nearer home, Janet."

"What a wild night it is!" said Janet Macleod quickly—and she went for a moment to the window. "The *Dunara* will be coming round the Mull of Cantire just about now. And where is the present, auntie, that the young lady sent you? You must write and thank her for that, at all events; and shall I write the letter for you in the morning?"

CHAPTER XIV.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

LADY MACLEOD remained obdurate; Janet went about the house with a sad look on her face; and Macleod, tired of the formal courtesy that governed the relations between his mother and himself, spent most of his time in snipe and duck shooting about the islands — braving the wild winds and wilder seas in a great open, lug-sailed boat, the *Umpire* having long ago been sent to her winter quarters. But the harsh, rough life had its compensations. Letters came from the south—treasures to be pored over night after night with an increasing wonder and admiration. Miss Gertrude White was a charming letter-writer; and now there was no restraint at all over her frank confessions and playful humours. Her letters were a prolonged chat

—bright, rambling, merry, thoughtful, just as the mood occurred. She told him of her small adventures and the incidents of her every-day life, so that he could delight himself with vivid pictures of herself and her surroundings. And again and again she hinted rather than said that she was continually thinking of the Highlands, and of the great change in store for her.

"Yesterday morning," she wrote, "I was going down the Edgware Road, and whom should I see but two small boys, dressed as young Highlanders, staring into the window of a toy-shop. Stalwart young fellows they were, with ruddy complexions and brown legs, and their Glengarries coquettishly placed on the side of their head; and I could see at once that their plain kilt was no holiday-dress. How could I help speaking to them?—I thought perhaps they had come from Mull. And so I went up to them and asked if they would let me buy a toy for each of them. 'We dot money,' says the younger, with a bold stare at my impertinence. 'But you can't refuse to accept a

present from a lady?' I said. 'Oh no, ma'am,' said the elder boy, and he politely raised his cap; and the accent of his speech —well, it made my heart jump. But I was very nearly disappointed when I got them into the shop; for I asked what their name was; and they answered 'Lavender.' 'Why, surely that is not a Highland name,' I said. 'No, ma'am,' said the elder lad; 'but my mamma is from the Highlands, and we are from the Highlands, and we are going back to spend the New Year at home.' 'And where is your home?' I asked; but I have forgotten the name of the place—I understood it was somewhere away in the north. And then I asked them if they had ever been to Mull. 'We have passed it in the *Clansman*,' said the elder boy. 'And do you know one Sir Keith Macleod there?' I asked. 'Oh no, ma'am,' said he, staring at me with his clear blue eyes as if I was a very stupid person, 'the Macleods are in Skye.' 'But, surely one of them may live in Mull?' I suggested. 'The Macleods are in Skye,' he maintained, 'and my papa was at

Dunvegan last year.' Then came the business of choosing the toys; and the smaller child would have a boat, though his elder brother laughed at him, and said something about a former boat of his having been blown out into Loch Rogue—which seemed to me a strange name for even a Highland loch. But the elder lad, he must needs have a sword; and when I asked him what he wanted that for, he said, quite proudly, 'To kill the Frenchmen with.' 'To kill Frenchmen with!' I said—for this young fire-eater seemed to mean what he said. 'Yes, ma'am,' said he, 'for they shoot the sheep out on the Flannan Islands when no one sees them; but we will catch them some day.' I was afraid to ask him where the Flannan Islands were, for I could see he was already regarding me as a very ignorant person; so I had their toys tied up for them, and packed them off home. 'And when you get home,' I said to them, 'you will give my compliments to your mamma, and say that you got the ship and the sword from a lady who has a great liking for the Highland people.' 'Yes, ma'am,' says he, touching his cap

again with a proud politeness; and then they went their ways, and I saw them no more."

Then the Christmas-time came, with all its mystery, and friendly observances, and associations; and she described to him how Carry and she were engaged in decorating certain schools in which they were interested; and how a young curate had paid her a great deal of attention until some one went and told him, as a cruel joke, that Miss White was a celebrated dancer at a music-hall.

Then, on Christmas morning, behold, the very first snow of the year! She got up early; she went out alone; the holiday world of London was not yet awake.

"I never in my life saw anything more beautiful," she wrote to him, "than Regent's Park this morning, in a pale fog, with just a sprinkling of snow on the green of the grass, and one great yellow mansion shining through the mist—the sunlight on it—like some magnificent distant palace. And I said to myself, if I were a poet or a painter I would take the common things, and show people the wonder and the beauty of

them; for I believe the sense of wonder is a sort of light that shines in the soul of the artist; and the least bit of the 'denying spirit'—the utterance of the word *connu*—snuffs it out at once. But then, dear Keith, I caught myself asking what I had to do with all these dreams, and these theories that papa would like to have talked about. What had I to do with art? And then I grew miserable—perhaps the loneliness of the park, with only those robust, hurrying strangers crossing, blowing their fingers and pulling their cravats closer—had affected me; or perhaps it was that I suddenly found how helpless I am by myself. I want a sustaining hand, Keith; and that is now far away from me. I can do anything with myself of set purpose; but it doesn't last. If you remind me that one ought generously to overlook the faults of others, I generously overlook the faults of others—for five minutes. If you remind me that to harbour jealousy and envy is mean and contemptible, I make an effort and throw out all jealous and envious thoughts—for five minutes. And so you see I got discontented

with myself; and I hated two men who were calling loud jokes at each other as they parted different ways; and I marched home through the fog, feeling rather inclined to quarrel with somebody. By the way, did you ever notice that you often can detect the relationship between people by their similar mode of walking, and that more easily than by any likeness of face? As I strolled home I could tell which of the couples of men walking before me were brothers by the similar bending of the knee and the similar gait, even when their features were quite unlike. There was one man whose fashion of walking was really very droll; his right knee gave a sort of preliminary shake as if it was uncertain which way the foot wanted to go. For the life of me I could not help imitating him; and then I wondered what his face would be like if he were suddenly to turn round and catch me."

That still dream of Regent's Park in sunlight and snow he carried about with him as a vision—a picture—even amid these blustering westerly winds and the riven seas that sprung

over the rocks, and swelled and roared away into the caves of Gribun and Bourg. There was no snow as yet up here at Dare; but wild tempests shaking the house to its foundations; and brief gleams of stormy sunlight lighting up the grey spindrift as it was whirled shorewards from the breaking seas; and then days of slow and mournful rain, with Staffa, and Lunga, and the Dutchman become mere dull patches of blurred purple —when they were visible at all—on the leaden-hued and coldly-rushing Atlantic.

"I have passed through the gates of the Palace of Art," she wrote two days later, from the calmer and sunnier south, "and I have entered its mysterious halls; and I have breathed for a time the hushed atmosphere of wonderland. Do you remember meeting a Mr. Lemuel at any time at Mrs. Ross's?—a man with a strange, grey, tired face, and large, wan, blue eyes, and an air as if he were walking in a dream? Perhaps not; but, at all events, he is a great painter, who never exhibits to the vulgar crowd, but who is wor-

shipped by a select circle of devotees; and his house is a temple dedicated to high art, and only profound believers are allowed to cross the threshold. Oh dear me! I am not a believer; but how can I help that? Mr. Lemuel is a friend of papa's, however—they have mysterious talks over milk-jugs of coloured stone, and small pictures with gilt skies and angels in red and blue. Well, yesterday he called on papa, and requested his permission to ask me to sit—or rather stand—for the heroine of his next great work, which is to be an allegorical one, taken from the *Faery Queen*, or the *Morte d'Arthur*, or some such book. I protested; it was no use. 'Good gracious, papa,' I said, 'do you know what he will make of me? He will give me a dirty brown face; and I shall wear a dirty green dress; and no doubt I shall be standing beside a pool of dirty blue water—with a purple sky overhead, and a white moon in it. The chances are he will dislocate my neck; and give me gaunt cheeks like a corpse; with a serpent under my foot, or a flaming dragon stretching his jaws behind my back.' Papa was deeply

shocked by my levity. Was it for me, an artist (bless the mark !), to balk the high aims of art? Besides, it was vaguely hinted that, to reward me, certain afternoon-parties were to be got up ; and then, when I had got out of Merlin-land, and assured myself I was human by eating lunch, I was to meet a goodly company of distinguished folk—great poets, and one or two more mystic painters, a *dilettante* Duke, and the nameless crowd of worshippers who would come to sit at the feet of all these, and sigh adoringly, and shake their heads over the Philistinism of English society. I don't care for ugly mediæval maidens myself, nor for allegorical serpents, nor for bloodless men with hollow cheeks, supposed to represent soldierly valour; if I were an artist I would rather show people the beauty of a common brick wall when the red winter sunset shines along it. But perhaps that is only my ignorance, and I may learn better before Mr. Lemuel has done with me."

When Macleod first read this passage, a dark expression came over his face. He did not like this new project.

"And so, yesterday afternoon," the letter continued, "papa and I went to Mr. Lemuel's house, which is only a short way from here; and we entered, and found ourselves in a large circular and domed hall, pretty nearly dark, and with a number of closed doors. It was all hushed and mysterious and dim; but there was a little more light when the man opened one of these doors and showed us into a chamber—or rather, one of a series of chambers—that seemed to me at first like a big child's toy-house, all painted and gilded with red and gold. It was bewilderingly full of objects that had no ostensible purpose—you could not tell whether any one of these rooms was dining-room, or drawing-room, or anything else; it was all a museum of wonderful cabinets filled with different sorts of ware, and trays of uncut precious stones, and Eastern jewellery, and what not; and then you discovered that in the panels of the cabinets were painted series of allegorical heads on a gold background; and then perhaps you stumbled on a painted glass window where no window should be. It was a splendid blaze

of colour, no doubt; one began to dream of Byzantine emperors, and Moorish conquerors, and Constantinople gilt domes. But then—mark the dramatic effect!—away in the blaze of the further chamber appears a solemn, slim, bowed figure, dressed all in black—the black velvet coat seemed even blacker than black—and the mournful-eyed man approached, and he gazed upon us a grave welcome from the pleading, affected, tired eyes. He had a slight cough too, which I rather fancied was assumed for the occasion. Then we all sat down, and he talked to us in a low, sad, monotonous voice; and there was a smell of frankincense about—no doubt a band of worshippers had lately been visiting at the shrine; and, at papa's request, he showed me some of his trays of jewels, with a wearied air. And some famous Botticelli that papa had been speaking about: would he look at it now? Oh, dear Keith, the wickedness of the human imagination! As he went about in this limp and languid fashion, in the hushed room, with the old-fashioned scent in the air, I wished I was a

street-boy. I wished I could get close behind him and give a sudden yell! Would he fly into bits? Would he be so startled into naturalness as to swear? And all the time that papa and he talked, I dared scarcely lift my eyes; for I could not but think of the effect of that wild 'Hi!' And what if I had burst into a fit of laughter without any apparent cause?"

Apparently Miss White had not been much impressed by her visit to Mr. Lemuel's palace of art, and she made thereafter but slight mention of it, though she had been prevailed upon to let the artist borrow the expression of her face for his forthcoming picture. She had other things to think about now, when she wrote to Castle Dare.

For one day Lady Macleod went into her son's room and said to him, "Here is a letter, Keith, which I have written to Miss White. I wish you to read it."

He jumped to his feet, and hastily ran his eye over the letter. It was a trifle formal, it is true; but it was kind, and it expressed

the hope that Miss White and her father would next summer visit Castle Dare. The young man threw his arms round his mother's neck and kissed her. "That is like a good mother," said he. "Do you know how happy she will be when she receives this message from you?"

Lady Macleod left him the letter to address. He read it over carefully; and though he saw that the handwriting was the handwriting of his mother, he knew that the spirit that had prompted these words was that of the gentle cousin Janet.

This concession had almost been forced from the old lady by the patience and mild persistence of Janet Macleod; but if anything could have assured her that she had acted properly in yielding, it was the answer which Miss Gertrude White sent in return. Miss White wrote that letter several times over before sending it off, and it was a clever piece of composition. The timid expressions of gratitude; the hints of the writer's sympathy with the romance of the Highlands and

the Highland character; the deference shown by youth to age; and here and there just the smallest glimpse of humour, to show that Miss White, though very humble and respectful and all that, was not a mere fool. Lady Macleod was pleased by this letter. She showed it to her son one night at dinner. "It is a pretty hand," she remarked critically.

Keith Macleod read it with a proud heart. "Can you not gather what kind of woman she is from that letter alone?" he said eagerly. "I can almost hear her talk in it. Janet, will you read it too?"

Janet Macleod took the small sheet of perfumed paper and read it calmly, and handed it back to her aunt. "It is a nice letter," said she. "We must try to make Dare as bright as may be when she comes to see us, that she will not go back to England with a bad account of the Highland people."

That was all that was said at the time about the promised visit of Miss Gertrude White to Castle Dare. It was only as a visitor that Lady Macleod had consented to

receive her. There was no word mentioned on either side of anything further than that. Mr. White and his daughter were to be in the Highlands next summer; they would be in the neighbourhood of Castle Dare; Lady Macleod would be glad to entertain them for a time, and make the acquaintance of two of her son's friends. At all events the proud old lady would be able to see what sort of woman this was whom Keith Macleod had chosen to be his wife.

And so the winter days and nights and weeks dragged slowly by; but always, from time to time, came those merry and tender and playful letters from the south, which he listened to rather than read. It was her very voice that was speaking to him, and in imagination he went about with her. He strolled with her over the crisp grass, whitened with hoar-frost, of the Regent's Park; he hurried home with her in the chill grey afternoons—the yellow gas-lamps being lit—to the little tea-table. When she visited a picture-gallery she sent him a full report of that even.

"Why is it," she asked, "that one is so delighted to look a long distance, even when the view is quite uninteresting? I wonder if that is why I greatly prefer landscape to figure subjects. The latter always seem to me to be painted from models just come from the Hampstead Road. There was scarcely a sea-piece in the exhibition that was not spoiled by figures, put in for the sake of picturesqueness, I suppose. Why, when you are by the sea you want to be alone, surely! Ah, if I could only have a look at those winter seas you speak of!"

He did not echo that wish at all. Even as he read he could hear the thunderous booming of the breakers into the giant caves. Was it for a pale rose-leaf to brave that fell wind that tore the waves into spindrift and howled through the lonely chasms of Ben-an-Sloich?

To one of these precious documents, written in the small neat hand on pink-toned and perfumed paper, a postcript was added: "If you keep my letters," she wrote, and he laughed when he saw that *if*, "I wish you would go back to the one in which I told you of papa

and me calling at Mr. Lemuel's house, and I wish, dear Keith, you would burn it. I am sure it was very cruel and unjust. One often makes the mistake of thinking people affected when there is no affectation of any sort about them. And if a man has injured his health and made an invalid of himself, through his intense and constant devotion to his work, surely that is not anything to be laughed at! Whatever Mr. Lemuel may be, he is at all events desperately in earnest. The passion that he has for his art, and his patience and concentration and self-sacrifice, seem to me to be nothing less than noble. And so, dear Keith, will you please to burn that impertinent letter?"

Macleod sought out the letter and carefully read it over. He came to the conclusion that he could see no just reason for complying with her demand. Frequently first impressions were best.

CHAPTER XV.

A GRAVE.

In the bygone days this eager, active, stout-limbed young fellow had met the hardest winter with a glad heart. He rejoiced in its thousand various pursuits; he set his teeth against the driving hail; he laughed at the drenching spray that sprung high over the bows of his boat; and what harm ever came to him if he took the short-cut across the upper reaches of Loch Scridain—wading waist-deep through a mile of sea-water on a bitter January day? And where was the loneliness of his life when always, wherever he went by sea or shore, he had these old friends around him—the red-beaked sea-pyots whirring along the rocks; and the startled curlews whistling their warning note across the

sea; and the shy duck swimming far out on the smooth lochs; to say nothing of the black game that would scarcely move from their perch on the larch-trees as he approached, and the deer that were more distinctly visible on the far heights of Ben-an-Sloich when a slight sprinkling of snow had fallen?

But now all this was changed. The awfulness of the dark winter time amid those northern seas overshadowed him. "It is like going into a grave," he had said to her. And with all his passionate longing to see her and have speech of her once more, how could he dare to ask her to approach these dismal solitudes? Sometimes he tried to picture her coming, and to read in imagination the look on her face. See now!—how she clings terrified to the side of the big open packet-boat that crosses the Frith of Lorn; and she dares not look abroad on the howling waste of waves. The mountains of Mull rise sad and cold and distant before her; there is no bright glint of sunshine to herald her approach. This small dog-cart now: it is a frail thing with which to plunge into the wild valleys, for surely

a gust of wind might whirl it into the chasm of roaring waters below! Glen-More: who that has ever seen Glen-More on a lowering January day will ever forget it—its silence, its loneliness, its vast and lifeless gloom? Her face is pale now; she sits speechless and awe-stricken; for the mountain-walls that overhang this sombre ravine seem ready to fall on her, and there is an awful darkness spreading along their summits under the heavy swathes of cloud. And then those black lakes far down in the lone hollows, more death-like and terrible than any tourist-haunted Loch Coruisk: would she not turn to him, and with trembling hands implore him to take her back and away to the more familiar and bearable south? He began to see all these things with her eyes. He began to fear the awful things of the winter time and the seas. The glad heart had gone out of him.

Even the beautiful aspects of the Highland winter had something about them—an isolation, a terrible silence—that he grew almost to dread. What was this strange thing, for example? Early in the morning he looked from the win-

dows of his room; and he could have imagined he was not at Dare at all. All the familiar objects of sea and shore had disappeared; this was a new world—a world of fantastic shapes, all moving and unknown—a world of vague masses of grey, though here and there a gleam of lemon-colour shining through the fog showed that the dawn was reflected on a glassy sea. Then he began to make out the things around him. That great range of purple mountains was only Ulva—Ulva transfigured and become Alpine! Then those wan gleams of yellow light on the sea?—he went to the other window, and behold! the eastern heavens parted, and there was a blaze of clear, metallic, green; and the clouds bordering on that beautiful light were touched with a smoky and stormy saffron-hue that flashed and changed amid the seething and twisting shapes of the mist. He turned to the sea again—what phantom ship was this that appeared in mid-air, and apparently moving when there was no wind? He heard the sound of oars: the huge vessel turned out to be only the boat of the Gometra

men going out to the lobster-traps. The yellow light on the glassy plain waxes stronger; new objects appear through the shifting fog; until at last a sudden opening shows him a wonderful thing far away—apparently at the very confines of the world—and awful in its solitary splendour. For that is the distant island of Staffa; and it has caught the colours of the dawn; and amid the cold greys of the sea it shines a pale transparent rose.

He would like to have sent her, if he had got any skill of the brush, some brief memorandum of that beautiful picture; but indeed, and in any case, that was not the sort of painting she seemed to care for just then. Mr. Lemuel, and his Palace of Art, and his mediæval saints, and what not, which had all for a time disappeared from Miss White's letters, began now to monopolize a good deal of space there; and there was no longer any impertinent playfulness in her references, but on the contrary a respect and admiration that occasionally almost touched enthusiasm. From hints more than statements Macleod gathered that Miss

White had been made much of by the people frequenting Mr. Lemuel's house. She had there met one or two gentlemen who had written very fine things about her in the papers; and certain highly distinguished people had been good enough to send her cards of invitation; and she had once or twice been persuaded to read some piece of dramatic poetry at Mr. Lemuel's afternoon parties; and she even suggested that Mr. Lemuel had almost as much as said that he would like to paint her portrait. Mr. Lemuel had also offered her—but she had refused to accept—a small but marvellous study by Pinturicchio, which most people considered the gem of his collection.

Macleod, reading and re-reading these letters many a time in the solitudes of western Mull, came to the opinion that there must be a good deal of amusement going on in London. And was it not natural that a young girl should like to be petted, and flattered, and made much of? Why should he complain when she wrote to say how she enjoyed this, and was charmed by that? Could he ask her to exchange that

gay and pleasant life for this hibernation in Mull? Sometimes for days together the inhabitants of Castle Dare literally lived in the clouds. Dense bands of white mist lay all along the cliffs; and they lived in a semi-darkness, with the mournful dripping of the rain on the wet garden, and the mournful wash of the sea all around the shores. He was glad, then, that Gertrude White was not at Castle Dare.

But sometimes, when he could not forbear opening his heart to her, and pressing her for some more definite assurance as to the future, the ordinary playful banter in which she generally evaded his urgency gave place to a tone of coldness that astonished and alarmed him. Why should she so cruelly resent this piteous longing of his? Was she no longer, then, anxious to escape from the thraldom that had seemed so hateful to her?

"Hamish," said Macleod, abruptly, after reading one of these letters, "come now, we will go and overhaul the *Umpire*. You know she is to be made very smart this summer; for we have people coming all the way from London to Dare,

and they must not think we do not know in Mull how to keep a yacht in good trim."

"Ay, sir," said Hamish; "and if we do not know that in Mull, where will they be likely to know that?"

"You will get the cushions in the saloon covered again; and we will have a new mirror for the ladies' cabin; and Miss Macleod, if you ask her, will put a piece of lace round the top of that, to make it look like a lady's room. And then, you know, Hamish, you can show the little boy Johnny Wickes how to polish the brass; and he will polish the brass in the ladies' cabin until it is as white as silver. Because, you know, Hamish, they have very fine yachts in the south. They are like hotels on the water. We must try to be as smart as we can."

"I do not know about the hotels," said Hamish, scornfully. "And perhaps it is a fine thing to hef a hotel; and Mr. M'Arthur they say he is a ferry rich man, and he has ferry fine pictures too; but I wass thinking that if I will be off the Barra Head on a bad night—

between the Sgriobh bhan and the Barra Head on a bad night—it is not any hotel I will be wishing that I wass in, but a good boat. And the *Umpire* she is a good boat; and I not hef fear of going anywhere in the world with her—to London or to Inverary, ay, or the Queen's own castle on the Island—and she will go there safe, and she will come back safe; and if she is not a hotel, well, perhaps she will not be a hotel, but she is a fine good boat, and she has swinging-lamps whatever."

But even the presence of the swinging-lamps which Hamish regarded as the highest conceivable point of luxury, did little to lessen the dolorousness of the appearance of the poor old *Umpire*. As Macleod, seated in the stern of the gig, approached her, she looked like some dingy old hulk relegated to the duty of keeping stores. Her topmast and bowsprit removed; not a stitch of cord on her; only the black iron shrouds remaining of all her rigging; her skylights and companion covered with tarpaulins—it was a sorry spectacle. And then when they went below, even the swinging-lamps

were blue-moulded and stiff. There was an odour of damp straw throughout. All the cushions and carpets had been removed; there was nothing but the bare wood of the floor and the couches and the table; with a match-box saturated with wet; an empty wine-bottle; a newspaper five months old; a rusty corkscrew; a patch of dirty water—the leakage from the skylight overhead.

That was what Hamish saw.

What Macleod saw—as he stood there absently staring at the bare wood—was very different. It was a beautiful, comfortable saloon that he saw, all brightly furnished and gilded, and there was a dish of flowers—heather and rowan berries intermixed—on the soft red cover of the table. And who is this that is sitting there—clad in sailor-like blue and white—and laughing as she talks in her soft English speech? He is telling her that, if she means to be a sailor's bride, she must give up the wearing of gloves on board ship, although, to be sure, those gloved small hands look pretty enough as they rest on the table and play with a bit of bell-heather. How

bright her smile is; she is in a mood for teasing people; the laughing face—but for the gentleness of the eyes—would be audacious. They say that the width between those long-lashed eyes is a common peculiarity of the artist's face; but she is no longer an artist; she is only the brave young yachtswoman who lives at Castle Dare. The shepherds know her, and answer her in the Gaelic when she speaks to them in passing; the sailors know her, and would adventure their lives to gratify her slightest wish; and the bearded fellows who live their solitary life far out at Dubh-Artach lighthouse, when she goes out to them with a new parcel of books and magazines, do not know how to show their gladness at the very sight of her bonnie face. There was once an actress of the same name; but this is quite a different woman. And to-morrow—do you know what she is going to do to-morrow?—to-morrow she is going away in this very yacht to a loch in the distant island of Lewis; and she is going to bring back with her some friends of hers who live there; and there will be high holiday at Castle Dare. An actress!

Her cheeks are too sun-browned for the cheeks of an actress.

"Well, sir?" Hamish said, at length; and Macleod started.

"Very well, then," he said, impatiently, "why don't you go on deck, and find out where the leakage of the skylight is?"

Hamish was not used to being addressed in this fashion; and he walked away with a proud and hurt air. As he ascended the companion-way, he was muttering to himself in his native tongue—

"Yes, I am going on deck to find out where the leakage is, but perhaps it would be easier to find out below where the leakage is. If there is something the matter with the keel, is it to the cross-trees you will go to look for it? But I do not know what has come to the young master of late."

When Keith Macleod was alone, he sate down on the wooden bench, and took out a letter, and tried to find there some assurance that this beautiful vision of his would some day be realised. He read it, and re-read it; but his anxious

scrutiny only left him the more disheartened. He went up on deck. He talked to Hamish in a perfunctory manner, about the smartening up of the *Umpire.* He appeared to have lost interest in that already.

And then again he would seek relief in hard work, and try to forget altogether this hated time of enforced absence. One night word was brought by some one that the typhoid fever had broken out in the ill-drained cottages of Iona; and he said at once that next morning he would go round to Bunessan and ask the sanitary inspector there to be so kind as to inquire into this matter, and see whether something could not be done to improve these hovels.

"I am sure the Duke does not know of it, Keith," his cousin Janet said, "or he would have a great alteration made."

"It is easy to make alterations," said he, "but it is not easy to make the poor people take advantage of them. They have such good health from the sea air that they will not pay attention to ordinary cleanliness. But now that two or three of the young girls and children are ill,

perhaps it is a good time to have something done."

Next morning, when he rose before it was quite daybreak, there was every promise of a fine day. The full moon was setting behind the western seas, touching the clouds there with a dusky yellow; in the east there was a wilder glare of steely blue, high up over the intense blackness of the peaks of Ben-an-Sloich; and the morning was still, for he heard, suddenly piercing the silence, the whistle of a curlew, and that became more and more remote as the unseen bird winged its flight far over the sea. He lit the candles, and made the necessary preparations for his journey; for he had some message to leave at Kinloch at the head of Loch Scridain, and he was going to ride round that way. By and by the morning light had increased so much that he blew out the candles.

No sooner had he done this than his eye caught sight of something outside that startled him. It seemed as though great clouds of golden-white, all ablaze in sunshine, rested on the dark bosom of the deep. Instantly he went

to the window; and then he saw that these clouds were not clouds at all, but the islands around glittering in the "white wonder of the snow," and catching here and there the shafts of the early sunlight that now streamed through the valleys of Mull. The sudden marvel of it! There was Ulva, shining beautiful as in a sparkling bridal veil; and Gometra a paler blue-white in shadow; and Colonsay and Erisgeir also a cold white; and Staffa a pale grey; and then the sea that the gleaming islands rested on had become a mirror of pale green and rose-purple hues reflected from the morning sky. It was all dream-like, so still, and beautiful, and silent. But he now saw that the fine morning would not last. Behind the house, clouds of a suffused yellow began to blot out the peaks of Ben-an-Sloich. The colours of the plain of the sea were troubled with gusts of wind until they disappeared altogether. The sky in the north grew an ominous black; until the further shores of Loch Tua were dazzling white against that bank of angry cloud. But to Bunessan he would go.

Janet Macleod was not much afraid of the weather at any time, but she said to him at breakfast, in a laughing way—

"And if you are lost in a snow-drift in Glen Finichen, Keith, what are we to do for you?"

"What are you to do for me?—why, Donald will make a fine Lament; and what more than that?"

"Cannot you send one of the Camerons with a message, Keith?" his mother said.

"Well, mother," said he, "I think I will go on to Fhion-fort and cross over to Iona myself, for the cottages are very bad there, I know; and if I must write to the Duke, it is better that I should have made the inquiries myself."

And indeed when Macleod set out on his stout young pony Jack, paying but little heed to the cold driftings of sleet that the sharp east wind was sending across, it seemed as though he were destined to perform several charitable deeds all on the one errand. For, firstly, about a mile from the house, he met Duncan the policeman, who was making his weekly round in the interests of morality and order; and who had to

have his book signed by the heritor of Castle Dare as sure witness that his peregrinations had extended so far. And Duncan was not at all sorry to be saved that trudge of a mile in the face of the bitter blasts of sleet; and he was greatly obliged to Sir Keith Macleod for stopping his pony, and getting out his pencil with his benumbed fingers, and putting his initials to the page. And then, again, when he had got into Glen Finichen, he was talking to the pony and saying—

"Well, Jack, I don't wonder you want to stop, for the way this sleet gets down one's throat is rather choking. Or are you afraid of the sheep loosening the rocks away up there, and sending two or three hundredweight on our head?"

Then he happened to look up the steep sides of the great ravine, and there, quite brown against the snow, he saw a sheep that had toppled over some rock, and was now lying with her legs in the air. He jumped off his pony, and left Jack standing in the middle of the road. It was a stiff climb up that steep

precipice, with the loose stones slippery with the sleet and snow; but at last he got a good grip of the sheep by the back of her neck, and hauled her out of the hole into which she had fallen, and put her, somewhat dazed but apparently unhurt, on her legs again. Then he half slid and half ran down the slope again; and got into the saddle.

But what was this now? The sky in the east had grown quite black; and suddenly the blackness began to fall as if torn down by invisible hands. It came nearer and nearer, until it resembled the dishevelled hair of a woman. And then there was a rattle and roar of wind and snow and hail combined; so that the pony was nearly thrown from its feet, and Macleod was so blinded that at first he knew not what to do. Then he saw some rocks ahead; and he urged the bewildered and staggering beast forward through the darkness of the storm. Night seemed to have returned. There was a flash of lightning overhead; and a crackle of thunder rolled down the valley, heard louder than all the howling of the hurricane across the

A SNOW STORM.

mountain sides. And then, when they had reached this place of shelter, Macleod dismounted, and crept as close as he could into the lee of the rocks.

He was startled by a voice—it was only that of old John Macintyre the postman, who was glad enough to get into this place of refuge too.

"It's a bad day for you to be out this day, Sir Keith," said he, in the Gaelic, "and you have no cause to be out; and why will you not go back to Castle Dare?"

"Have you any letter for me, John?" said he eagerly.

Oh, yes, there was a letter; and the old man was astonished to see how quickly Sir Keith Macleod took that letter, and how anxiously he read it, as though the awfulness of the storm had no concern for him at all. And what was it all about—this wet sheet that he had to hold tight between his hands, or the gusts that swept round the rock would have whirled it up and away over the giant ramparts of Bourg? It was a very pretty letter; and rather

merry; for it was all about a fancy-dress ball which was to take place at Mr. Lemuel's house; and all the people were to wear a Spanish costume of the time of Philip IV.; and there were to be very grand doings indeed. And as Keith Macleod had nothing to do in the dull winter-time but devote himself to books, would he be so kind as to read up about that period, and advise her as to which historical character she ought to assume?

Macleod burst out laughing—in a strange sort of way; and put the wet letter in his pocket; and led Jack out into the road again.

"Sir Keith, Sir Keith," cried the old man, "you will not go on now?"—and as he spoke another blast of snow tore across the glen, and there was a rumble of thunder among the hills.

"Why, John," Macleod called back again, from the grey gloom of the whirling snow and sleet, "would you have me go home and read books too? Do you know what a fancy-dress ball is, John? And do you know what they think of us in the south, John—that we have

nothing to do here in the winter time—nothing to do here but read books?"

The old man heard him laughing to himself, in that odd way, as he rode off and disappeared into the driving snow; and his heart was heavy within him, and his mind filled with strange forebodings. It was a dark and an awful glen—this great ravine that led down to the solitary shores of Loch Scridain.

CHAPTER XVI.

OVER THE SEAS.

But no harm at all came of that reckless ride through the storm; and in a day or two's time Macleod had almost argued himself into the belief that it was but natural for a young girl to be fascinated by these new friends. And how could he protest against a fancy-dress ball when he himself had gone to one on his brief visit to London? It was a proof of her confidence in him that she wished to take his advice about her costume.

Then he turned to other matters; for, as the slow weeks went by, one eagerly disposed to look for the signs of the coming spring might occasionally detect a new freshness in the morning air, or even find a little bit of the whitlow-

grass in flower among the moss of an old wall. And Major Stewart had come over to Dare once or twice; and had privately given Lady Macleod and her niece such enthusiastic accounts of Miss Gertrude White that the references to her forthcoming visit ceased to be formal and became friendly and matter-of-course. It was rarely, however, that Keith Macleod mentioned her name. He did not seem to wish for any confidant. Perhaps her letters were enough.

But on one occasion Janet Macleod said to him, with a shy smile—

"I think you must be a very patient lover, Keith, to spend all the winter here. Another young man would have wished to go to London."

"And I would go to London, too!" he said, suddenly, and then he stopped. He was somewhat embarrassed. "Well, I will tell you, Janet. I do not wish to see her any more as an actress; and she says it is better that I do not go to London; and—and, you know, she will soon cease to be an actress."

"But why not now," said Janet Macleod, with some wonder, "if she has such a great dislike for it?"

"That I do not know," said he, somewhat gloomily.

But he wrote to Gertrude White, and pressed the point once more, with great respect, it is true, but still with an earnestness of pleading that showed how near the matter lay to his heart. It was a letter that would have touched most women; and even Miss Gertrude White was pleased to see how anxiously interested he was in her.

"But you know, my dear Keith," she wrote back, "when people are going to take a great plunge into the sea, they are warned to wet their head first. And don't you think I should accustom myself to the change you have in store for me by degrees? In any case, my leaving the stage at the present moment could make no difference to us—you in the Highlands, I in London. And do you know, sir, that your request is particularly ill-timed; for as it happens I am

about to enter into a new dramatic project of which I should probably never have heard but for you. Does that astonish you? Well, here is the story. It appears that you told the Duchess of Wexford that I would give her a performance for the new training-ship she is getting up; and, being challenged, could I break a promise made by you? And only fancy what these clever people have arranged—to flatter their own vanity in the name of charity. They have taken St. George's Hall; and the distinguished amateurs have chosen the play; and the play—don't laugh, dear Keith—is *Romeo and Juliet!* And I am to play *Juliet* to the *Romeo* of a certain Captain Brierley, who is a very good-looking man, but who is so solemn and stiff a Romeo that I know I shall burst out laughing on the dreaded night. He is as nervous now at a morning rehearsal as if it were his *débût* at Drury Lane; and he never even takes my hand without an air of apology, as if he were saying, 'Really Miss White, you must pardon me; I am compelled by

my part to take your hand; otherwise I would die rather than be guilty of such a liberty.' And when he addresses me in the balcony-scene, he *will not* look at me; he makes his protestations of love to the flies; and when I make my fine speeches to him, he blushes if his eyes should by chance meet mine, just as if he had been guilty of some awful indiscretion. I know, dear Keith, you don't like to see me act; but you might come up for this occasion only. Friar Lawrence is the funniest thing I have seen for ages. The nurse, however—Lady Bletherin—is not at all bad. I hear there is to be a grand supper afterwards somewhere; and I have no doubt I shall be presented to a number of ladies who will speak for the first time to an actress and be possessed with a wild fear; only, if they have daughters, I suppose they will keep the fluttering-hearted young things out of the way, lest I should suddenly break out into blue flame, and then disappear through the floor. I am quite convinced that Captain Brierley considers me a

bold person because I look at him when I have to say—

> "O gentle Romeo,
> If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully!"

Macleod crushed this letter together, and thrust it into his pocket. He strode out of the room, and called for Hamish.

"Send Donald down to the quay," said he abruptly, "and tell them to get the boat ready. And he will take down my gun too."

Old Hamish, noticing the expression of his master's eyes, went off quickly enough, and soon got hold of Donald, the piper-lad.

"Donald," said he, in the Gaelic, "you will run down to the quay as fast as your legs can carry you, and you will tell them to get the boat ready, and not to lose any time in getting the boat ready, and to have the seats dry, and let there be no talking when Sir Keith gets on board. And here is the gun, too; and the bag; and you will tell them to have no talking among themselves this day."

When Macleod got down to the small stone pier, the two men were in the boat. Johnny Wickes was standing at the door of the store-house.

"Would you like to go for a sail, Johnny? Macleod said, curtly—but there was no longer that dangerous light in his eyes.

"Oh yes, sir," said the boy eagerly; for he had long ago lost his dread of the sea.

"Get in, then, and get up to the bow."

So Johnny Wickes went cautiously down the few slippery stone steps, half tumbled into the bottom of the great open boat, and then scrambled up to the bow.

"Where will you be going, sir?" said one of the men, when Macleod had jumped into the stern, and taken the tiller.

"Anywhere—right out!" he answered carelessly.

But it was all very well to say "right out!" when there was a stiff breeze blowing right in. Scarcely had the boat put her nose beyond the pier—and while as yet there was but little way on her—when a big sea caught her, springing

high over her bows and coming rattling down on her with a noise as of pistol-shots. The chief victim of this deluge was the luckless Johnny Wickes, who tumbled down into the bottom of the boat, vehemently blowing the salt water out of his mouth, and rubbing his knuckles into his eyes. Macleod burst out laughing.

"What's the good of you as a look-out?" he cried. "Didn't you see the water coming?"

"Yes, sir," said Johnny, ruefully laughing too. But he would not be beaten. He scrambled up again to his post, and clung there, despite the fierce wind and the clouds of spray.

"Keep her close up, sir," said the man who had the sheet of the huge lug-sail in both his hands, as he cast a glance out at the darkening sea.

But this great boat, rude and rough and dirty as she appeared, was a splendid specimen of her class; and they know how to build such boats up about that part of the world. No matter with how staggering a plunge she went down into the yawning green gulf—the white

foam hissing away from her sides—before the next wave, high, awful, threatening, had come down on her with a crash as of mountains falling, she had glided buoyantly upwards, and the heavy blow only made her bows spring the higher, as though she would shake herself free, like a bird, from the wet. But it was a wild day to be out. So heavy and black was the sky in the west that the surface of the sea, out to the horizon, seemed to be a moving mass of white foam with only streaks of green and purple in it. The various islands changed every minute as the wild clouds whirled past. Already the great cliffs about Dare had grown distant and faint as seen through the spray; and here were the rocks of Colonsay, black as jet as they reappeared through the successive deluges of white foam; and far over there, a still gloomier mass against the gloomy sky told where the huge Atlantic breakers were rolling in their awful thunder into the Staffa caves.

"I would keep off a bit, sir," said the sailor next Macleod. He did not like the look of

the heavy breakers that were crashing on to the Colonsay rocks.

Macleod, with his teeth set hard against the wind, was not thinking of the Colonsay rocks more than was necessary to give them a respectful berth.

"Were you ever in a theatre, Duncan?" he said—or rather bawled—to the brown-visaged and black-haired young fellow, who had now got the sheet of the lug-sail under his foot as well as in the firm grip of his hands.

"Oh yes, Sir Keith," said he, as he shook the salt water away from his short beard. "It wass at Greenock I will be at the theatre, and more than three times or four times."

"How would you like to have a parcel of actors and actresses with us now?" he said, with a laugh.

"'Deed, I would not like it at all," said Duncan, seriously; and he twisted the sheet of the sail twice round his right wrist, so that his relieved left hand could covertly convey a bit of wet tobacco to his mouth. "The women they would chump apout, and then you do not know what will happen at all."

And so they went plunging and staggering and bounding onwards, with the roar of the water all around them, and the foam at her bows, as it sprang high into the air, showing quite white against the black sky ahead. The younger lad Duncan was clearly of opinion that his master was running too near the shores of Colonsay; but he would say no more, for he knew that Macleod had a better knowledge of the currents and rocks of this wild coast than any man on the mainland of Mull. John Cameron, forward, kept his head down to the gunwale, his eyes looking far over that howling waste of sea; Duncan, his younger brother, had his gaze fixed mostly on the brown breadth of the sail, hammered at by the gusts of wind; while as for the boy at the bow, that enterprising youth had got a rope's end, and was endeavouring to strike at the crest of each huge wave as it came ploughing along in its resistless strength.

But at one moment the boat gave a heavier lurch than usual, and the succeeding wave struck her badly. In the great rush of water

that then ran by her side, Macleod's startled eye seemed to catch a glimpse of something red—something blazing and burning red in the waste of green, and almost the same glance showed him that there was no boy at the bow! Instantly, with just one cry to arrest the attention of the men, he had slipped over the side of the boat, just as an otter slips off a rock. The two men were bewildered but for a second. One sprang to the halyards and down came the great lug-sail; the other got out one of the long oars, and the mighty blade of it fell into the bulk of the next wave as if he would with one sweep tear her head round. Like two madmen the men pulled; and the wind was with them, and the tide also; but, nevertheless, when they caught sight —just for a moment—of some object behind them, that was a terrible way away. Yet there was no time, they thought, or seemed to think, to hoist the sail again; and the small dingay attached to the boat would have been swamped in a second; and so there was nothing for it but the deadly struggle with

those immense blades against the heavy resisting mass of the boat. John Cameron looked round again; then, with an oath, he pulled his oar across the boat.

"Up with the sail, lad!" he shouted; and again he sprang to the halyards.

The seconds, few as they were, that were necessary to this operation, seemed ages; but no sooner had the wind got a purchase on the breadth of the sail than the boat flew through the water, for she was now running free.

"He has got him! I can see the two!" shouted the elder Cameron.

And as for the younger? At this mad speed the boat would be close to Macleod in another second or two; but in that brief space of time the younger Cameron had flung his clothes off, and stood there stark naked in the cutting March wind.

"This is foolishness!" his brother cried in the Gaelic. "You will have to take an oar!"

"I will not take an oar!" the other cried, with both hands ready to let go the halyards

"And if it is foolishness, this is the foolishness of it; I will not let you or any man say that Sir Keith Macleod was in the water and Duncan Cameron went home with a dry skin!"

And Duncan Cameron was as good as his word; for as the boat went plunging forward to the neighbourhood in which they occasionally saw the head of Macleod appear on the side of a wave and then disappear again as soon as the wave broke—and as soon as the lug-sail had been rattled down—he sprang clear from the side of the boat. For a second or two, John Cameron, left by himself in the boat, could not see any one of the three; but at last he saw the black head of his brother, and then some few yards beyond, just as a wave happened to roll by, he saw his master and the boy. The boat had almost enough way on her to carry her the length; he had but to pull at the huge oar to bring her head round a bit. And he pulled, madly and blindly, until he was startled by a cry close by. He sprang to the side of the boat. There was his brother drifting by,

holding the boy with one arm. John Cameron rushed to the stern to fling a rope; but Duncan Cameron had been drifting by with a purpose; for as soon as he got clear of the bigger boat, he struck for the dingay, and got hold of that, and was safe. And here was the master, too, clinging to the side of the dingay, so as to recover his breath; but not attempting to board the cockle-shell in these plunging waters. There were tears running down John Cameron's rugged face as he drew the three up and over the side of the big boat.

"And if you wass drowned, Sir Keith, it wass not me would have carried the story to Castle Dare. I would just as soon have been drowned too."

"Have you any whisky, John?" Macleod said, pushing his hair out of his eyes, and trying to get his moustache out of his mouth.

In ordinary circumstances John Cameron would have told a lie; but on this occasion he hurriedly bade the still undressed Duncan to take the tiller, and he went forward to a locker at the bows which was usually kept for

bait, and from thence he got a black bottle which was half full.

"Now, Johnny Wickes," Macleod said to the boy, who was quite blinded and bewildered, but otherwise apparently not much the worse, "swallow a mouthful of this, you young rascal! and if I catch you imitating a dolphin again, it is a rope's end you'll have, and not good Highland whisky."

Johnny Wickes did not understand; but he swallowed the whisky, and then he began to look about him a bit.

"Will I put my clothes round him, Sir Keith?" Duncan Cameron said.

"And go home that way to Dare?" Macleod said with a loud laugh. "Get on your clothes, Duncan, lad; and get up the sail again; and we will see if there is a dram left for us in the bottle. John Cameron, confound you, where are you putting her head to?"

John Cameron, who had again taken the tiller, seemed as one demented. He was talking to himself rapidly in Gaelic; and his brows were frowning; and he did not seem to notice that

he was putting the head of the boat—which had now some little way on her, by reason of the wind and tide, though she had no sail up—a good deal too near the southernmost point of Colonsay.

Roused from this angry reverie, he shifted her course a bit; and then, when his brother had got his clothes on, he helped to hoist the sail, and again they flew onwards and shorewards, along with the waves that seemed to be racing them; but all the same he kept muttering and growling to himself in the Gaelic. Meanwhile Macleod had got a huge oil-skin over-coat, and wrapped Johnny Wickes in it, and put him in the bottom of the boat.

"You will soon be warm enough in that, Master Wickes," said he; "the chances are you will come out boiled red, like a lobster. And I would strongly advise you, if we can slip into the house and get dry clothes on, not to say a word of your escapade to Hamish."

"Ay, Sir Keith," said John Cameron, eagerly, in his native tongue, "that is what I will be saying to myself. If the story is told; and

Hamish will hear that you will nearly drown yourself; what is it he will not do to that boy? It is for killing him he will be."

"Not as bad as that, John," Macleod said, good-naturedly. "Come, there is a glass for each of us; and you may give me the tiller now."

"I will take no whisky, Sir Keith, with thanks to you," said John Cameron; "I was not in the water."

"There is plenty for all, man!"

"I was not in the water."

"I tell you there is plenty for all of us!"

"There is the more for you, Sir Keith," said he, stubbornly.

And then, as great good luck would have it, it was found, when they got ashore, that Hamish had gone away as far as Salen on business of some sort or other; and the story told by the two Camerons was that Johnny Wickes, whose clothes were sent into the kitchen to be dried, and who was himself put to bed, had fallen into the water down by the quay; and nothing at all was said about Keith Macleod

having had to leap into the sea off the coast of Colonsay. Macleod got into Castle Dare by a back way; and changed his clothes in his own room. Then he went away up stairs to the small chamber in which Johnny Wickes lay in bed.

"You have had the soup, then? You look pretty comfortable."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, whose face was now flushed red with the reaction after the cold. "I beg your pardon, sir."

"For tumbling into the water?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, look here, Master Wickes. You chose a good time. If I had had trousers on, and waterproof leggings over them, do you know where you would be at the present moment? You would be having an interesting conversation with a number of lobsters at the bottom of the sea, off the Colonsay shores. And so you thought because I had my kilt on, that I could fish you out of the water?"

"No, sir," said Johnny Wickes. "I beg your pardon, sir."

"Well, you will remember that it was owing to the Highland kilt that you were picked out of the water; and that it was Highland whisky put life into your blood again; you will remember that well; and if any strange lady should come here from England and ask you how you like the Highlands, you will not forget?"

"No, sir."

"And you can have Oscar up here in the room with you, if you like, until they let you out of bed again; or you can have Donald to play the pipes to you until dinner-time."

Master Wickes chose the less heroic remedy; but, indeed, the companionship of Oscar was not needed; for Janet Macleod—who might just as well have tried to keep her heart from beating as to keep herself away from any one who was ill or supposed to be ill—herself came up to this little room, and was very attentive to Master Wickes, not because he was suffering very much from the effects of his ducking, but because he was a child, and alone, and a stranger. And to her Johnny Wickes told the whole story;

despite the warning he had received that, if Hamish came to learn of the peril in which Macleod had been placed by the carelessness of the English lad, the latter would have a bad time of it at Castle Dare. Then Janet hastened away again; and finding her cousin's bedroom empty, entered; and there discovered that he had, with customary recklessness, hung up his wet clothes in his wardrobe. She had them at once conveyed away to the lower regions; and she went with earnest remonstrances to her cousin and would have him drink some hot whisky-and-water; and when Hamish arrived, went straight to him too, and told him the story in such a way that he said—

"Ay, ay, it wass the poor little lad! And he will mek a good sailor yet. And it wass not much dancher for him when Sir Keith wass in the boat; for there is no one in the whole of the islands will sweem in the water as he can sweem; and it is like a fish in the water that he is."

That was about the only incident of note—and little was made of it—that disturbed the

monotony of life at Castle Dare at this time. But by and by, as the days passed, and as eager eyes looked abroad, signs showed that the beautiful summer-time was drawing near. The deep blue came into the skies and the seas again; the yellow mornings broke earlier; far into the evening they could still make out the Dutchman's Cap, and Lunga, and the low-lying Coll and Tiree amid the glow at the horizon after the blood-red sunset had gone down. The white stars of the saxifrage appeared in the woods; the white daisies were in the grass; as you walked along the lower slopes of Ben-an-Sloich the grouse that rose were in pairs. What a fresh green this was that shimmered over the young larches! He sent her a basket of the first trout he caught in the loch.

The wonderful glad time came nearer and nearer. And every clear and beautiful day that shone over the white sands of Iona and the green shores of Ulva, with the blue seas all breaking joyfully along the rocks, was but a day thrown away that should have been reserved

for her. And whether she came by the *Dunara* from Greenock, or by the *Pioneer* from Oban, would they hang the vessel in white roses in her honour; and have velvet carpetings on the gangways for the dainty small feet to tread on; and would the bountiful heavens grant but one shining blue day for her first glimpse of the far and lonely Castle Dare? Janet the kind-hearted was busy from morning till night—she herself would place the scant flowers that could be got in the guests' rooms. The steward of the *Pioneer* had undertaken to bring any number of things from Oban; Donald the piper-lad had a brand new suit of tartan, and was determined that, short of the very cracking of his lungs, the English lady would have a good Salute played for her that day. The *Umpire*, all smartened up now, had been put in a safe anchorage in Loch-na-Keal; the men wore their new jerseys; the long gig, its golden-yellow pine shining with varnish, was brought along to Dare, so that it might, if the weather were favourable, go out to bring the Fair Stranger to her High-

land home. And then the heart of her lover cried—" *O winds and seas—if only for one day—be gentle now!—so that her first thoughts of us shall be all of peace and loveliness, and of a glad welcome, and the delight of clear summer days!'*

END OF VOL. II.

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